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# **Curatorship and Post-Duchampian Art in Transnational Contexts**

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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# Abstract

## Curatorship and Post-Duchampian Art in Transnational Contexts

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This research examines the role of the artist Marcel Duchamp as a curator, his legacy in the field of curatorship and how the curatorial procedures engendered by him can be transposed to contemporaneity. It presents the dynamics of Post-Duchampian art as those artistic manifestations that make regular use of abstract concepts and which are nurtured by the context to which they belong. Bauman and Foucault provided the sources for the theoretical framework. Based on their texts, the first chapter discusses the change in society marked by the shift from Modern to contemporary times. Its impact on the art field is considered through a perspective derived from art history. It also explains why Duchamp was an important agent in this transition and how a new arrangement of the world can be understood through his legacy. The second chapter analyses Duchamp's actions in organizing and conceiving exhibitions, treating them with the importance they are due and filling a significant gap in the field of curatorship. A critical approach investigates Duchamp artwork's presence at the Armory Show, Duchamp's function as head of exhibitions at the Société Anonyme and his position as *générateur-arbitre* of the Surrealist exhibitions. Some of his iconic artworks (e.g. *Large Glass*) are examined in depth under the prism of Duchamp's curatorship. A comparison between Duchamp's pioneering curatorial thinking and the tendencies installed by Alfred Barr at the Museum of Modern Art in New York concludes this chapter. In the last chapter, as the characteristics of Duchamp's curatorial practice have just been presented, thus Duchamp's last curatorial work *Étant Donnés* is analysed. Next, this research introduces the case studies: the Brazilian artists Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles to bring about a clearer understanding of Post-Duchampian art in transnational contexts. It ends reviewing the solo exhibitions of each of these artists at Tate Modern, in London.





*This work is dedicated to the memory of my grandmothers:*

**Ione Lourega de Menezes**

**Therezinha de Carvalho Ramos**



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# Introduction

The importance of Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) artistic work has already been the focus of several writings and heated academic and artistic debates. The reason for this is his undeniable contribution to the development and consolidation of new artistic languages that emerged in the effervescent period that marked the 20th century (Tomkins 2005, 2013; Cabanne 1971, 1997; Naumann 2000, 2012). Duchamp's influence is consolidated not only in art history but also in the history of exhibitions, since the artist made explicit their *modus operandi* as few have done, by playing with their basic constituent elements (Filipovic 2008, Kachur, 2003).

Although Duchampian studies have already given rise to a vast literature, Duchamp's activities described in these publications are essentially characterized as the activities of an artist. Sometimes, he is also categorized as a player who incorporates his role unreservedly, especially from 1923 onwards, when he said he would dedicate himself almost entirely to chess. Nevertheless, when I started preparing what would be my PhD proposal, it was virtually impossible to name a scholar who would dare to openly describe Duchamp as a curator. At this point, around 2007, Duchamp's activity as a curator was fairly misunderstood or perhaps unknown.

This oversight was the driving force that ignited this research, whose main cornerstone and greatest contribution is precisely the expansion of perceptions and definitions about what Duchamp's practice truly was, most specifically in the field of curating. My aim thus became not only to make explicit his role as a curator, but also to go beyond the action of revealing his curatorial practice. I want with this research to deeply investigate Duchamp's curatorial practice in order to comprehend and map his methods. My hypothesis was that Duchamp's curatorial practice could be useful as a toolbox to understand the development of exhibition-making when handling contemporary art.

That which at the beginning of the research process presented itself as a hypothesis and an uneasy feeling, proved to be the correct trail to follow. This path led me to encounter in Duchamp's curating, a paradigm to a better under-



standing of the curatorial strategies behind the transnational display of contemporary art, in particular, when dealing with artistic expressions that are directly derived from Duchamp's bequest, a post-Duchampian art. Post-Duchampian is a terminology that I am going to explore in chapter 1. The fabrication of the term is justified as it embraces a type of art that pertains to contemporary art, but has its own logic, dynamics and its own defining characteristics. Here, I use 'fabrication' to imply that it is an expression that was built from prepared components, something invented from given information, and also as a Duchampian pun, it is a term that carries the sense that it can also be a piece of fiction, like the in consonant definitions of art history also discussed in chapter 1. Thus, the second original contribution of this work is to provide an analysis of Duchamp's curatorial thought in contemporary case studies associated with post-Duchampian art.

This research was developed over nine years starting when I was involved with the *University of the Arts Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation*, and was submitted for the examiners' consideration in the first week of January 2017. A few months later, I learnt that days before my thesis submission, on 21st December 2016, the book *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (Filipovic, 2016) had been published, which covers the same subject as mine. In 2018, another book was published about the theme: *Duchamp as Curator* (Wiehager and Neuburguer, 2018). It is a compendium of essays that resulted from a symposium that took place at the Daimler Art Collection in Berlin, in April 2017. It is regarded by its publishing house as the first substantial publication on the topic (Daimler Art Collection, n.d.). In the opening text Wiehager and Neuburger (2018) state:

Marcel Duchamp made exhibition practice an important part of his work. Curatorial gestures and concepts that determined the staging of his works and allowed him to move away from canonical definitions of the artist; publications and photographic documentations and of his New York studios; themes, contributions and layouts for art magazines; activity as a consultant, juror and staging curator for exhibitions in the contexts of American Modernism, Dada and Surrealism; the exertion of a powerful influence on important private collections of his time – Duchamp exhausted all conceivable exhibiting and collecting. While deliberately distancing himself from given structures of artistic work [...] he approached a concept of curatorial practice as an aesthetic medium that is today well established.[...] Duchamp gave the multiple

possibilities for perception and open perspectives of interpretation of his oeuvre, via the staging, reproduction and multiplication of his own and other's works, a new conceptual direction, one which defined a turn in contemporary art. (Wiehager and Neuburger, 2018, p.24)

In spite of the fact that Duchamp initiated his curatorial activities more than one century ago and carried out said practice until his death in 1968, this critical chapter in art history is still in its early stages of investigation. Wiehager and Neuburger (2018) for example, explain that during their work on an exhibition 'which tracked the historical significance of the readymade concept' (Wiehager and Neuburger, 2018, p.14) it became clear to them that there was 'a missing link' which was 'a comprehensive representation of Duchamp's curatorial activities and their significance within his oeuvre' (Wiehager and Neuburger, 2018, p.15) and they hope that 'the discussion of the topic Duchamp as Curator, which is highly relevant to contemporary art will continue to be lively and controversial' (Wiehager and Neuburger, 2018, p.29).

Filipovic also affirms in her 2016 book that curating owes its embryo to Duchamp: 'More than occasional occupations or ancillary undertakings, however, "curatorial" tasks were in Duchamp's hands a veritable lifework and the pivotal catalyst through which to understand and expose the artwork as such.' (Filipovic, 2016, p.3)

These two new publications highlight Duchamp's role as the pioneer of contemporary art curating, which is also the chief addition of my doctoral work to the field of art history theory. This synchronicity shows the relevance of my thesis and the pertinency of the analyses presented here. However, my thesis goes into more depth. In addition to acknowledging his role as a curator introducing records of Duchamp's curatorial projects that indisputably attest to that, my thesis provides a deeper analysis of his curatorial practice. By recurrently using primary sources to recall what his curatorial projects were like, I grasped what his strategies and methods were in the exhibition space. I also contextualised my findings to understand what curatorial trends were in vogue during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century comparing them to other historical curatorial initiatives, I uncovered the novelty of Duchamp's thinking during his curatorship.

My thesis investigated Duchamp's artworks paying attention to when they were on display, in an interplay with his curatorial practice. In this way, I disclosed a series of concepts that are further encountered in Duchamp's curatorial

practice. I have not only shed light on the dynamics of the readymades, but I have also explained the relation of *Nude Descending a Staircase* with the concept of time and the connection between body and mind. I applied the notion of transparency found in *Large Glass* to his work as a curator, and finally I examined his final artwork *Étant Donnés*, to encapsulate his strategies and methods to bring them to nowadays. In doing that, my thesis cast a new perspective that had not been made before with such weight. My findings about Duchamp built a theoretical framework that can later be applied when debating the development of exhibition-making.

Thus, in terms of research into Duchamp's curatorial practices, my thesis brings newer inputs than the other publications on the theme. Wiehager and Neuburger's book, for example – as mentioned above – is a collection of essays by different authors such as Filipovic and Eva Kraus (which were already included in the bibliography of this thesis). They are not presented as lengthy research papers. Filipovic's text in *Duchamp as Curator*, for instance, is a translated and condensed version of a text published more than 10 years ago in her book *Marcel Duchamp: Uma Obra Que Não é Uma Obra "de Arte"* (2008), published on the occasion of a Duchamp retrospective in São Paulo. Wiehager's essay about the *Société Anonyme*, though, contains a description of facts that can seem to present new discoveries for those who have only perceived of Duchamp as an artist. But, the most analytical part of Wiehager's text refers to Duchamp's writings about the *Société Anonyme's* artists but not the exhibitions themselves.

Differently from these two examples that came out after the submission of this thesis, his curatorial activities, in many previous studies, have often been relegated to a lower level or not described as such. Filipovic (2016) herself makes explicit this issue writing 'Apparently Marginal Activities' in the title of her most recent book on the topic. In her previous book on the topic *Marcel Duchamp: Uma Obra Que Não é Uma Obra "de Arte"* (2008) Filipovic mentioned once, but not in an emphatic manner, that Duchamp was a 'curator/designer of exhibitions that radically reconceives what the space of an art exhibition could look like.' (Filipovic, 2008, p.3). Apparently, even though she introduced a relevant analysis of the exhibitions that Duchamp creatively undertook the curatorial responsibility for, the author avoided openly declaring Duchamp as a curator in her earlier book on the subject.

One example of published analyses of the significance of curatorial practice to Duchamp's oeuvre and his contribution to 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century cura-

tion is the book *Displaying the Marvellous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Kachur, 2003), which provides an in-depth review of pertinent shows that he curated, clarifying his methods and feats but refraining from characterizing his activities as curatorship.

Kachur (2003), for instance, argued that Duchamp expanded the definition of artist to include the one of exhibition designer, but Duchamp is still mainly designated as an artist in this publication.

More recent studies such as *Breton Duchamp Kiesler – Surreal Space 1947* (Kraus, 2013) and *Playing with Earth and Sky: Astronomy, Geography, and the art of Marcel Duchamp* (Housefield, 2016) are more emphatic in remarking on Duchamp's activities as close to curating, with him being treated as a 'designer of experiences'. However, what is more noticeable in the bibliography on the theme, such as the article *A New Look: Marcel Duchamp, His Twine, and The 1942 First Papers of Surrealism Exhibition* (Vick, n.d.), is that Duchamp's curating is seldom the protagonist, even when the subject of the published study is the ground-breaking exhibitions he made possible.

The interpretation of Duchamp as an artist who occasionally put together exhibitions has always disconcerted me, since when Duchamp carried out most of his curatorships, he was no longer openly acting as an artist. Duchamp's last painting – *Tu'm* (figure 1) – is dated 1918. When he undertook the curatorial enterprise in the organization named *Société Anonyme, Inc.: Museum of Modern Art: 1920*, it had already been two years since he picked up a brush. In 1923 he left his masterpiece *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, or the Large Glass* (figure 2) unfinished.



Figure 1  
*Tu'm*  
Duchamp, M. (1918)  
Available at: <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/50128>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)  
Oil on canvas, with bottlebrush, safety pins, and bolt, 69.8 x 303 cm



Figure 2

*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*

Duchamp, M. (1915-1923)

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/54149.html>

(Accessed 15 October 2016)

Oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels

277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm

In other words, when in 1926 he co-curated the International Exhibition of Modern Art assembled by the Société Anonyme at the Brooklyn Museum, he was already considered by art critics as someone who had swept art aside (Bohan, 1982).

Therefore, in a simplification of his trajectory based on his public and publicized achievements during his lifetime (not taking into account what was revealed after his death), a contemporary colleague of Duchamp could no longer consider him an artist, not only solely a player but essentially a curator. It is hard to believe that a mind like Duchamp's, preoccupied with complex intellectual procedures already exhaustively exposed in his discourse against retinal art, would not give the role of curator a higher prestige.

This thesis, hence, focuses on the analysis and conceptualization of Duchamp's actions as curator, treating them with the importance they are due and filling a significant historical and theoretical gap. As explained above, Duchamp's trajectory has been rarely analysed under the prism of the trajectory of a curator. I do not just bring this issue to the forefront of the debate, but I used many sources to accelerate the debate towards Duchamp as a curator. In this way, Duchamp's legacy became an important agent of transformation in the history of art, but moreover his achievements can be also included in the history of exhibitions and the development of curatorship.

For this reason, from the beginning I used the term curator and not exhibition-maker, exhibition organizer or *générateur-arbitrate*, when referring to Duchamp. Although the word curator was not common at the time, in the contemporary art environment, the Duchampian concept regarding this activity presents similarities conceptually linked to the practices and contemporary studies regarding curatorship.

Therefore, before going further in introducing this research, it is crucial to first clarify the definition of curating, exhibition-making and co-curation used in this thesis. Curating and exhibition-making can be understood as adjacent activities. One could say that exhibition-making encompasses curating and curating encompassing exhibition-making. They are concepts that go together and that, in some cases, were and are used as synonyms. However, if we scrutinize the activities that define them historically, we perceive the difference in their meanings.

Before the advent of the contemporary art curator, the word curating was used in the cultural sector to designate mainly the function of those who work with art and cultural heritage in public and private collections, museums and libraries (Fowle, 2007). Under the curating function's umbrella were included the tasks of safeguarding the heritage, enriching collections, research and finally, displaying the collection (Heinich & Pollak, 2005). Thus, to show, to present artworks, a documented research, books, artefacts, etc., to the public in a coherent exhibition display was the culmination of the curator's job. The detachment that occurred between exhibiting and curating came after the displacement of the function of curator from such institutions and collections. In the book *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, Smith explains this stage when the difference between curating and exhibition-making became clear:

Although museums have not been abandoned, art curating is no longer necessarily tied to them, except by conservative definitions that draw a distinction between the curator devoted above all to the care and conservation of collections and the exhibition maker who does only, or mostly, what the name suggests. Instead, curating now comprehends not only exhibition making but also programming at many kinds of alternative venues, and is often adjunct to even the most experimental art space. (2012, p.19)

Some authors such as the curator Robert Storr interpret the definition of 'exhibition-maker' as more appropriate in the context of contemporary art curating:

In short, good exhibitions have a definite but not definitive point of view that invites serious analysis and critique, not only of the art but of the particular weights and measures used in its evaluation by the exhibition-maker. That term has only recently come into use and despite its bulkiness, it is preferable in this context to "curator" to the extent that it acknowledges the existence of a specific and highly complex discipline and separates the care or preservation of art – a curator's primary concern – from its variable display. Many of the best exhibition-makers are freelancers or work for institutions that have no permanent collection. (Storr, 2003, p.1)

The Swiss Harald Szeemann (1933–2005), who was the curator of remarkable exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form*, in the Kunsthalle

Bern in 1969, would define himself as an *Ausstellungsmacher*, the German word for exhibition-maker. He is one of the well-known practitioners in curating that used the notions of 'curating' and 'exhibition-making' as almost the same thing. Szeemann is considered by theorists on curatorship as the father of contemporary art curating (Strauss, 2006; Fowle, 2007; Obrist, 2008 and 2011; and Smith 2012).

Hans Ulrich Obrist, curator and writer of referential books on the history of curating such as *A Brief History of Curating* (2008) and *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating But Were Afraid to Ask* (2011) had Szeemann as a mentor in his profession and made the following comment about Szeemann's self-definition as exhibition-maker:

There is more at stake in adopting such a designation than semantics. Szeemann is more conjurer than curator – simultaneously archivist, conservator, art handler, press officer, accountant, and above all, accomplice of the artists. (Obrist, 2008, p.80)

Obrist aligns himself to the trend of curators that understand the scope of curating beyond that of setting up exhibitions. In exhibitions, the paramount moment when art encounters the public is one of the most noticeable and impactful outcomes of the curatorial practice. For Obrist, 'exhibition-making often has to do with rules of the game' (2011, p.60). That is, it is not only associated with the relationship between artist and curators, art and public, but also in many aspects 'exhibition-making' is subjected to the institutional forces and the relationships with the context in which it is immersed or from where it comes.

Moreover, exhibition-making doesn't necessarily have curatorial thought at its core. For example, curator and professor in curatorship Maria Lind in the text *The Curatorial* states that: 'It is clear that curating is much more than making exhibitions: it involves commissioning new work and working beyond the walls of an institution, as well as beyond what are traditionally called programming and education'. (Lind, 2010, p.63). Another referential contemporary curator, Charles Esche, who has been director of the Van Abbemuseum, in Eindhoven, since 2004, and was the curator of the 31<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Biennial in 2014, among other international biennales, shares a similar opinion, in which the term 'exhibition-making' is not enough to incorporate the multitask features of curating and neither is its principal aspect. In 2001, still in an early stage of his career, Esche summarised his opinion about 'exhibition-making' as detailed below:



I also decided to concentrate on the exhibitions because that seems to be the model for presenting ideas in contemporary art that we are most familiar with. However, more recently I've been questioning the exhibition as a format for developing my own passion, which is to work with artists, following and supporting what they do and the ideas they have. Towards the end I'd like to introduce into the discussion ways of rethinking the privileged place of the exhibition over the aspects of our visual culture more generally. The challenge that we have as curators is to think very broadly across art forms but also in relationship to society, in particular ways that are as much political and social as they might be art historical. That challenge cannot necessarily always be answered by an exhibition. (Hiller & Martin, 2001a, p.58)

As observed by Esche, curating is equal to enabling and the curator would be in the position of facilitating artists to make and show art, beyond standard exhibition modes. His approach is closer to those ideas implemented in the field by Walter Hopps (1932- 2005), who used to compare the figure of curator to the conductor of an orchestra (Strauss, 2006). The North American curator Hopps, together with Szeeman, is regarded as a precursor of contemporary art curating (Strauss, 2006; Fowle, 2007; Obrist, 2008 and 2011; and Smith 2012). Among other achievements, in the 1950s, Hopps opened the path to new artists in his Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles. Additionally, from 1963 to 1967, he was the director of the Pasadena Museum where one of his first actions was to give Duchamp his first museum retrospective in 1963. Fowle describes both curators as role models whose principles subsequently typified the function of curator:

Furthermore, as Szeemann and Hopps demonstrated, actively engaging with art and artists is central to practice, which is an aspect of the role for which there are no guarantees of immediate or quantifiable outcomes. This requires a kind of creative 'maintenance,' as opposed to Foucault's 'care,' as it involves supporting the seeds of ideas, sustaining dialogues, forming and reforming opinions, and continuously updating research. It could also be said that exhibitions are not the first, or only, concern of the curator. Increasingly the role includes producing commissioned temporary artworks, facilitating residencies, editing artist-books, and organizing one-time events. (Fowle, 2007, p.18)

In the midst of the reflections on curating listed here, Hopps' perspective on curating is the closest definition that permeates this thesis, after all, Hopps' view derived directly from Duchamp's informal teachings. Obrist when talking about his own trajectory and his beliefs, pointed to what Duchamp once taught Hopps: 'Yes, in my whole way of arguing, there has always been this rhetoric about the curator being invisible: Duchamp once told Walter Hopps that "the curator should not stand in the way", and I think that's very important.' (Obrist, 2011, p.134)

Within the analogy of the curator as the conductor of an orchestra resides the idea of the artwork as a score to be read and its set can be presented to the audience as a symphonic ensemble. There is also the notion of respect for the artist and his/her artistic expression which is similar to the attention paid to the musicians and the position and performance time of each particular musical instrument. In an interview to Obrist, Hopps defined his perspective in this manner:

Fine curating of an artist's work — that is, presenting it in an exhibition — requires as broad and sensitive understanding of an artist's work as a curator can possibly muster. This knowledge needs to go well beyond what is actually put in the exhibition. Likewise, as far as conducting goes, a thorough knowledge of the full body of Mozart's music underlies a fine conductor's approach to, say the Jupiter Symphony. (Obrist, 2008, p.16)

In the continuance of this interview, Hopps mentioned Katherine Dreier, Duchamp's partner in curatorial endeavours, as the first name at the top of the list of important predecessor curators:

Of the curators, I admired Katherine Dreier enormously, with her exhibitions and activities, because she, more than any other collector or impresario I knew, felt she should facilitate what they [the artists] actually wanted to do, to the greatest extent possible. (Obrist, 2008, p. 16)

Hopps would agree with Obrist that Katherine Dreier was 'the artists' accomplice' (Obrist, 2008, p. 16) commenting on her association with Duchamp and Man Ray. However, as is further examined in chapter 2, differently from her relationship with Man Ray to whom she provided guidance regarding his career's development, the partnership with Duchamp was towards curatorial practice and not solely as a curator supporting an artist. In particular, when taking into consideration that Katherine Dreier herself was an artist, and that

Duchamp helped her. Nonetheless, the designation ‘accomplice’ although used in the context by Hopps and Obrist with a bit of wit containing also the sense of ‘partners in crime’ is significant to understanding what ‘co-curating’ means in the scope of this research. Ultimately, it can be interpreted as a person who joins with another in carrying out some plan, in other words, a cooperator.

For example, contemporary curator Lisette Lagnado says that co-curating implied that curatorial partners do not work only following one single mind. When I asked her about when she invited other people to share the curatorial responsibility of the 27<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial (2006), she said ‘When building the notion of “living together” it does not make sense to work with hierarchies’ (Menezes, 2005, p.1). In order to form a collective project, Lagnado gathered a group of curators with different skills and knowledge that would complement each other. They could easily distribute tasks according to each profile.

Co-curating in terms of Duchamp’s practice and curatorial legacy also has this quality. There are no hierarchies but rather partners whose different backgrounds and sensibility would add to each other and work together for the accomplishment of a project built with transparency. Similar to the lesson from Duchamp to Hopps that the ‘curator should not stand in the way’, co-curators should also work together in an egalitarian manner, with none being more important than the other. I better document this feature of Duchamp’s curatorial practice in chapter 2.

In this thesis, Duchamp is a curator in the broad sense following the etymology of the word ‘to take care of’ like Szeemann had suggested that one should look at when thinking about curatorship: ‘After all, the word curator already contains the concept of care.’ (Szeemann quoted in Fowle 2007, p.10). Throughout this research, one can observe that Duchamp had a much more curatorial approach when dealing with art, than an artist’s posture. He did ‘care’ in the sense that he helped artists, connected them, wrote and designed catalogues, worked for private collectors, contributed to building public collections, and other subtle gestures that didn’t reveal themselves only when he was in charge of ‘exhibition-making’, even though ‘exhibition-making’ was very much at the core of his curatorial activities, as he was interested in the encounter of the art with the public.

Thus, the starting point of this research is the challenge of organizing contemporary art exhibitions for a greater and transnational public, tak-

ing into account the transformations of the nature of artistic expression since Duchamp's legacy. My personal interest in the curatorial activity started early on in my life. When I was still very young, in Rio de Janeiro, I came into contact with the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica's (1937-1980) art practice, which is nurtured by a more participative character. Perhaps due to enchantment or intuition, any artistic expression that ventured beyond the customary fine arts tradition was what attracted me the most. However, I soon realized that this phenomenon that allowed me to perceive an artistic manifestation was not an experience that everybody would share when visiting the same exhibition. Over the course of time, observing the reaction of other members of the public in several exhibitions, I also noticed that sometimes the sensitivity towards and appreciation of an artwork may differ more depending on the manner in which it is presented rather than because of the art itself. Sometimes, people wanted to see an exhibition in a specific art space or gallery independently of the type of art that was being shown. This means that they would go to acknowledge the effort of the person who was in charge of organizing the exhibitions. Nowadays, in retrospect, I believe that these investigative proto-experiences generated the kernel of my fascination with the process involved in exhibition-making and subsequently curating. At the time I already had a clear understanding of the aspects that compose art creation. Therefore, it was up to my incessant curiosity to attempt to grasp what procedures were followed to reach the last stage of the aesthetic experience. And by aesthetic experience I mean when a work of art finds its ultimate purpose, when an artistic creation is in contact with the other, the public, spectator, participant, viewer, someone or a distinct mind from the one where the work of art was conceived.

This inquisitiveness guided my academic production. The germinal work from which this thesis originated is *The Conceptual Art and Museum Culture: A problem of aesthetics negotiation*, the dissertation that I presented in 2006 for the Masters in History of Art: Europe, Asia and America, at the University of Sussex. The leading hypothesis of this study was that Conceptualism created a problem regarding the politics of display and ownership in art institutions as the attributes of a work of art are composed of a series of ephemeral actions and ideas, what today I would argue is an example of post-Duchampian art. My MA dissertation re-assessed British conceptualism in relation to major British art institutions, then considered it in terms of how it interacted with, and finally affected, the policies of the Tate Gallery. I demonstrated how the urgency for a proper set-

ting and new exhibition-making procedures resulted in the plan for a new gallery space, that is today the Tate Modern museum (Menezes, 2006). My previous academic research influenced the choice for the exhibitions at Tate Modern as case studies for this thesis. The museum was configured after the changes that Conceptualism – which has post-Duchampian characteristic – provoked in exhibition-making.

My professional career was also directed by this desire to understand the layers behind curating and exhibition-making, firstly as art historian and educator, then as a cultural journalist and art critic, when I published articles, reviews and interviews with artists and curators, and in the past years mainly as a curator. Working alongside diverse art institutions and independent projects in the UK, Brazil, Spain, Portugal and Germany has offered me the chance to engage in international collaborations throughout my professional trajectory. From my personal experience, I was able to realise that the challenges of curatorship are even more intriguing when the work of art is contextually displaced. In these cases, the curator should be extra careful with her/his strategies to unite the art context and art coefficient together with the physicality (or non-physicality) of the artwork. Thus, my research and professional paths always pointed out the need to comprehend the curatorial activity as an open field for intellectual hypothesis, not dealing solely with the selection or disposition of pieces in the gallery. This preoccupation is one of the reasons why I have followed the trails left by Duchamp to produce this research which aspires to assist in creating a solid theory regarding curatorship, based on the historical and epistemological developments in the art field.

Bearing this in mind, the primary aim of this research is to analyse the role of curatorial practices conducted in accordance with Duchamp's experiments and theories, particularly when they pertain to transnational contexts. As methodology, I initially chose to pursue a critical bibliographical method situating the changes that occurred in the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the light of Bauman's sociology and Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, together with critical texts about Duchamp's artistic thinking, art practice and curatorial achievements, as for example the writings of Dawn Ades, Neil Cox & David Hopkins, Thierry De Duve, Francis Naumann, Pierre Cabanne and Calvin Tomkins. Duchamp himself did not write any theoretical books but contributed with texts to catalogues and other publications and gave lectures as for example, *The Creative Act*, 1957, (published in Tomkins, 2005) that has been transcribed and

published. I have also studied the extensive number of interviews that he gave since early on in his life and his correspondence.

This thesis employs a qualitative research method (Tracy, 2013), as its research question concerns, mainly, a shift in the paradigm used to comprehend the role of the curator. In fact, we are dealing with the transition from the concept of 'exhibition-making' to 'curating', as exposed earlier in this introduction. A paradigm, in research terms, is the preferred way 'of understanding reality, building knowledge, and gathering information about the world' (Tracy, 2013, p.38). The new paradigm identified here as post-Duchampian, a concept that is developed throughout this thesis, provoked a change in the axiology of the curatorial studies. Axiology is the values associated with areas of research and theorizing (Tracy, 2013).

A postmodern/poststructural research method was adopted, as this research acknowledges the crisis of representation, examining the reappropriation and layering of reality as the basis for the theoretical understanding of Duchamp's role as a pivotal figure in the exhibition-making to curating paradigm change. These relations are going to be explored in depth in chapter 1. The crisis of representation and the reappropriation and layering of reality are key features of a postmodern/poststructural research method approach (Tracy, 2013).

This methodological approach was chosen because poststructuralists assume that all people have room for agency – the ability to act in a scene or context – and also the capacity to choose among alternatives. It provided me the flexibility to understand the transformations and changes that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the field of curating, even if they came about slowly, through Duchamp's individual practices rather than grand gestures. Mumby (1997) highlights that this methodology allows researchers to perceive and analyse such slow changes. At the same time, a postmodernist approach gave me the intellectual tools to question totalizing truths and certainty, helping to build the central theoretical framework of this thesis, based on the premises that reality and knowledge are fragmented, multiple, and multi-faceted. In addition to this, a key part of the postmodern paradigm was highly instrumental to understanding a core question in chapter 1, namely the crisis of representation, which refers to the idea that all representations of meaning depend on their relations with other signs and representations. From this point of view, all explanations and descriptions are interrelational (Tracy, 2013), explaining the way chapter 1 was designed.

In sum, this methodology allowed me to employ qualitative methods aiming toward examining multi-faceted ways of being and the dialectical nature of hegemony. A comprehensive literature review provided the foundations of the theories employed and those developed, especially concerning the theories used to understand the impact of Duchamp's ideas in the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century art. Michael Foucault and Zigmunt Bauman were central authors for framing these theoretical ideas.

Further to the literature review, primary research was conducted. This consisted of visits to archives and museums. In the context of this research, the visits to archives were vital, as archive is a concept that 'is intended to capture the acts of classifying, collecting, and storing information that inform the evidence used in research' (Robertson, 2010, p.1). Archival logics and practices become themselves artefacts of history (Robertson, 2010). Featherstone also reminds us that 'behind all scholarly research stands the archive. The ultimate plausibility of a piece of research depends on the grounds, the sources, from which the account is extracted and compiled.' (2006, p.591). Archives were also chosen because they are 'means of generating ethical and epistemological credibility.' (Osborne, 1999, p. 51)

Consequently, it was necessary to dive into long-existing archives and also surf digital ones to find old letters and papers that would provide essential information regarding Duchamp's curatorial activities. The most important archive I visited was the Brooklyn Museum Archives, in New York, where I could find details about the Société Anonyme. Inspecting and sorting through the many documents in the box related to the museum's director William Henry Fox (who was director from 1914 to 1934), I came across Katherine Dreier's correspondence with him that sometimes was also signed by Duchamp. I could also handle many of Société Anonyme's rare publications because the museum's director was a member of the organization and kept pamphlets and newsletters. In other boxes related to other departments of the museum that I sifted through, I encountered detailed documentation about Société Anonyme's exhibitions in the museum. Letters to other members of the staff supplied information about Duchamp's co-curation. I also found records such as press releases, besides internal communication about the International Exhibition of Modern Art Assembled by the Société Anonyme that proved that Duchamp was regarded as a curator.

In addition to that, I gained access to the digital archive of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University where I delved into the folder titled 'Katherine S. Dreier Papers / Société Anonyme Archive' where photographs, correspondence, texts, books and catalogues about her and the Société Anonyme are available for research. To find supplementary primary resources about Duchamp's curatorial activities, I similarly gained access to the digitalized version of the Walter Pach Papers at the Archives of American Art provided by the Smithsonian Institution. Moreover, I took advantage of other historical documents available in digital format, for instance, The Philadelphia Museum Bulletin. Equally important and worth mentioning is the *Tout-fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, containing a large number of papers about Duchamp and online versions of historical documents.

In reference to the contemporary case studies, it is worth mentioning that as primary research I used Hélio Oiticica's documents and papers that were indexed and linked to the Enciclopédia de Artes Visuais Itaú Cultural by the Programa Hélio Oiticica, a herculean task that gathered Oiticica's writings in almost their totality and made them obtainable online. Not last in importance as primary resources were my conversations with Cildo Meireles that resulted in two different published interviews (Menezes, 2005a and 2011).

The visit to Duchamp's artworks on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art can be deemed primary research as Hooper-Greenhill says:

Visual experience cannot always be articulated verbally, and this makes it more difficult to discuss, to share, to understand. The gut response to colour, the physical reaction to mass, the engagement with the visual that is both embodied and cerebral, remains mysterious. Within museums, the phenomenon of display (or of exhibition), is the major form of pedagogy. It is the experience of the displays for most visitors defines the museum, and it is through displays that museums produce and communicate knowledge. (2000, p.4)

During my research, I visited the Philadelphia Museum of Art where I was able to survey the rooms where Duchamp did the curatorship of his own artworks and left his curatorial testament *Étant Donnés: 1. La chute d'eau 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (*Given: The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas*), this last one safeguarded in the manner that Duchamp had instructed. The chance to be a member of the public for whom Duchamp, in the past, prepared his artwork and its display, without



a doubt, helped me to write about *Étant Donnés* in chapter 3. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, I was also able to have the aesthetical experience of encountering *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, or the Large Glass* that was placed in front of a longitudinal window from where one could see the museum's outside patio with a fountain in the background. This vision with layers of metalanguage comprising history and present was a surprise for me. This experience provoked the insight into the transparency of the Large Glass, the association with windows and its relationship with Duchamp's curatorial practice, in which the context is also a key element.

In the interest of my research, I strived to reach a high standard of rigorous information checking and sought to gather narratives sometimes forgotten in the past. Perhaps this is the reason that herein I aimed to launch a new view concerning Duchamp and curatorship. I felt compelled to bring this same commitment to the section dedicated to contemporary examples of exhibition-making. Besides the research methods mentioned above, as a methodological writing strategy, I decided on a recursive narrative in which Duchamp's oeuvre also refers to Duchamp's curatorial practice. I have chosen some of his iconic artworks to examine in depth under the prism of Duchamp's thinking and curatorial practice. It means that the artwork's interpretation here also functions as a metonymy of Duchamp's understanding of the world and also his procedures towards curating and exhibition-making. Consequently, as a self-referential procedure, more attention will be paid to the invention of the readymades with emphasis on *Fountain* (1917, figure 3), the painting *Nude Descending a Staircase n°2* (1912, figure 4); the inception of the *Large Glass* (1915-1923) and the *Étant Donnés*: 1. *La chute d'eau* 2. *Le gaz d'éclairage* (*Given: The Waterfall* 2. *The Illuminating Gas*) installation (figures 5 and 6) revealed in 1969 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, after his death in 1968. Intertwining the historical background of these works with the writing, I aimed to propose a final panorama (featuring a creative and poetic reading) in which the artistic practice is part and parcel of the mind that was also in charge of curatorial decisions.

Thus, the first objective of this thesis is to propose a clearer understanding of the dynamics of post-Duchampian art and its effects on the development of contemporary exhibitions. It begins with the spatiotemporal definitions in which this theoretical framework is positioned: the contemporary proposals in the field of art indicating an erosion of the unequivocal semantic meaning that used to accompany objects in the perception process forged by the

modern world. With regards to art, Duchamp was the main name to carry out such undertakings in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and his legacy has been influencing contemporary art since then. The artist transferred the interpretation of meaning from the eye to the brain, opening an inter-subjective dimension where one object may have many interpretations depending on the context.

Thus, chapter 1 titled *The impact of Marcel Duchamp on the transition in contemporary art* highlights Marcel Duchamp's thoughts which provide the key points for the thesis' discussion. Adopting his art practice and ideas as a springboard, I discussed the inconsonant definitions found in art history regarding Modernism and avant-garde and their implications. Next, following Bauman's (1998, 2010) thoughts, I drew a framework to contextualize this study. According to Bauman (1998) the main shift present in the passage from Modern to contemporary times is basically the liquefaction of a set of belief systems into a solid reality created by modern theories.

In the realm of art these theories can be observed in the proliferation of artistic avant-gardes that later resulted in the impossibility of the same avant-gardes in the sense of an artistic movement that pursued a single or better truth in art. The multiplicity of meanings observed in contemporary art is one of the effects of this liquefaction process. The ideas proposed by Duchamp are related to this process of a proliferation of meanings and are essential to comprehending the main features presented in contemporary art.

In this topic, I used the notion developed by Michel Foucault in his book *The Order of Things* (2002), in which he analyses our perception of the world and how reality has been changing since the advent of the Enlightenment, firstly generating the Modern Age with its set of theories based on scientific belief up to the multiplicity of meanings that we are experiencing nowadays. In this section, the shift in art proposed by Duchamp will be not analysed in an isolated manner. The changes in art are seen as part of a chain of scientific and cultural transformations that were implemented in the passage from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have renovated the manner in which reality has been perceived.

A literature review about Duchamp and a short biography are covered here. This section also draws upon the authors mentioned above, such as for example Tomkins (2005, 2013), Cabanne (1971, 1997) and Naumann (2000, 2012) who provide key biographical information, Schwarz (1997) and Paz (2002) who offer analyses on Duchamp's artworks, and Ades, Cox, Hopkins (1999), Parkin-



Figure 3

Fountain

Duchamp, M. (1917)

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/92488.html?mulR=11901451|4#>

(Accessed 15 October 2016)



Figure 4  
Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)  
Duchamp, M. (1912)  
Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51449.html?mulR=1609402098|1>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)  
Oil on canvas  
147 x 89.2 cm (Framed: 151.8 x 93.3 x 5.1 cm)



Figure 5

*Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas)

Duchamp, M. (1946-1966)

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/65633.html?mulR=517581968|26#>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)

Mixed media assemblage: (exterior) wooden door, iron nails, bricks, and stucco; (interior) bricks, velvet, wood, parchment over an armature of lead, steel, brass, synthetic putties and adhesives, aluminum sheet, welded steel-wire screen, and wood; Peg-Board, hair, oil paint, plastic, steel binder clips, plastic clothespins, twigs, leaves, glass, plywood, brass piano hinge, nails, screws, cotton, collotype prints, acrylic varnish, chalk, graphite, paper, cardboard, tape, pen ink, electric light fixtures, gas lamp (Bec Auer type), foam rubber, cork, electric motor, cookie tin, and linoleum

242.6 × 177.8 × 124.5 cm



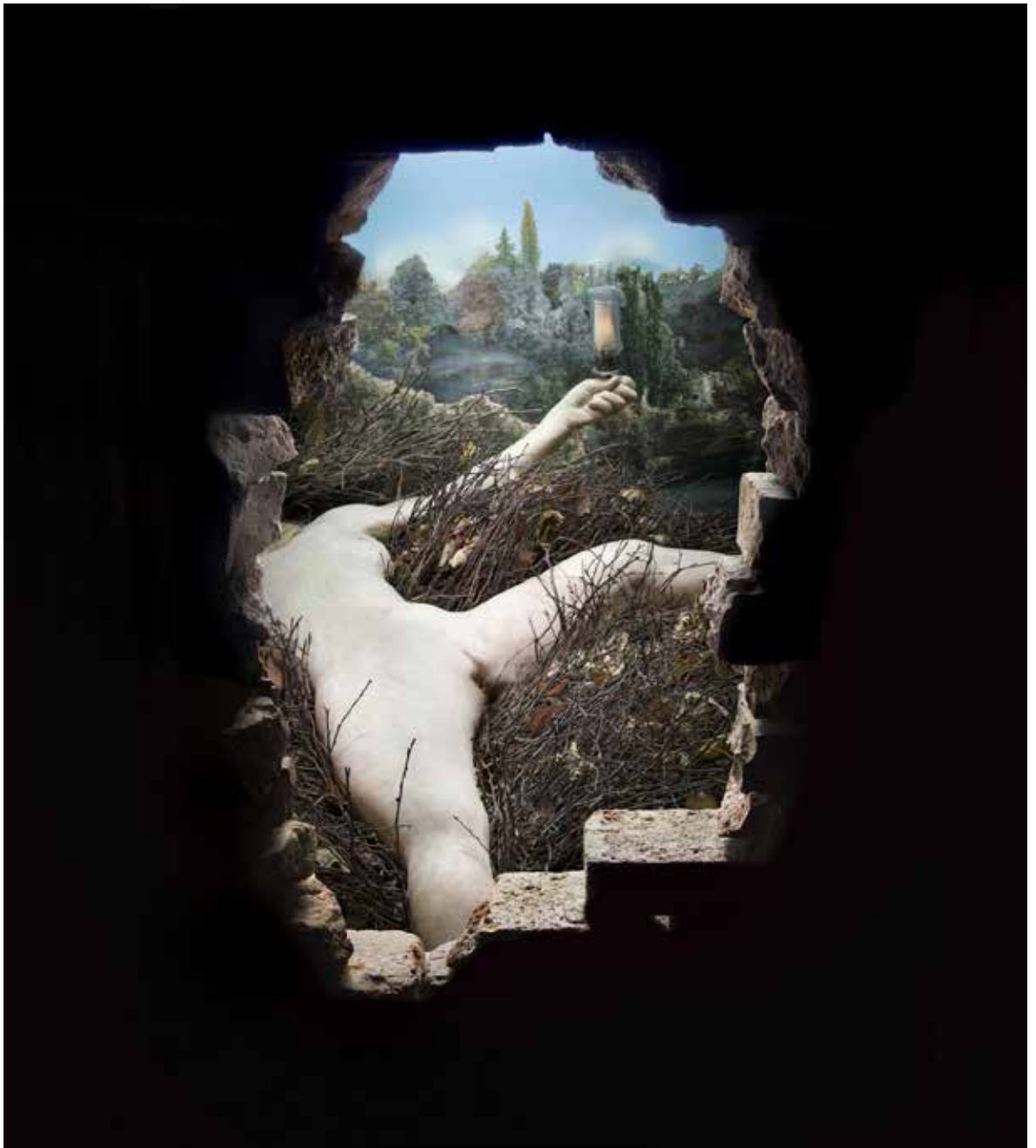


Figure 6

*Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas)

Duchamp, M. (1946-1966)

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/65633.html?mulR=517581968|26#> (Accessed 15 October 2016)

Mixed media assemblage: (exterior) wooden door, iron nails, bricks, and stucco; (interior) bricks, velvet, wood, parchment over an armature of lead, steel, brass, synthetic putties and adhesives, aluminum sheet, welded steel-wire screen, and wood; Peg-Board, hair, oil paint, plastic, steel binder clips, plastic clothespins, twigs, leaves, glass, plywood, brass piano hinge, nails, screws, cotton, collotype prints, acrylic varnish, chalk, graphite, paper, cardboard, tape, pen ink, electric light fixtures, gas lamp (Bec Auer type), foam rubber, cork, electric motor, cookie tin, and linoleum

242.6 × 177.8 × 124.5 cm

son (2008), Duve (1991, 1996) and Buchloch (1991), theorists who present a critical review of his legacy. At the end of this chapter, I returned to the realm of art history to present a survey of Duchamp's influence on subsequent generations of artists and art writers. The first chapter constitutes the theoretical framework that enables a greater understanding of post-Duchampian art.

Chapter 2 titled *Duchamp's curatorial practice* is designed to fill the void regarding Duchamp's activities as a curator. Thus, an effort is made to restore his role in such function and the changes he introduced in exhibition-making. This section maps his achievements since the beginning of his interest in this subject until ground-breaking exhibitions such as the International Surrealist Exhibition, 1938, at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris and the First Papers of Surrealism, 1942, New York. I argued that very special attention should be addressed to his role at the Société Anonyme, Inc.

The reason for this decision is Duchamp's long involvement with the organization that lasted from its inauguration in 1920 to its end in 1950. Duchamp was the Head of Exhibitions of the Société Anonyme (Gross, 2006) since its foundation in 1920. He was the conductor that orchestrated its first ever exhibition, in which he invested in an unforeseen framework and then actively collaborated to bringing international names to show in its galleries (Gross, 2006 and Joselit, 2006). Above all else, he was the co-curator with Katherine Dreier of the 1926 International Exhibition of Modern Art, the largest survey of Modernism in the USA since the Armory Show in 1913. The Armory Show, in which the *Nude Descending a Staircase n°2* caused a sensation, is also the focus of consistent analysis in this chapter as well as the partnership between Dreier and Duchamp. Their mutual respect and commitment to the Société Anonyme helped create the conditions that enabled the above-mentioned International Exhibition to be a successful enterprise, and put the *Large Glass* on display for the first time to the public. Considerations regarding the nature of this artwork, which is considered Duchamp's masterpiece, are presented and posed in parallel to its use in an exhibition installation. This chapter comprises as bibliographical references, researchers that wrote about the Société Anonyme and published analyses of the implication of Duchamp's co-curatorial and curatorial practice, such as Gross (2006), Joselit (2006) and Bohan (1982, 2006), in addition to the archival material aforementioned when describing my methodology and use of primary resources.

This section puts Duchamp forward as one of the agents of the transition in art and reviews his life and work. Besides that, this section also deals with

methodological principles concerning the production of a curatorial project, addressing questions regarding its procedure, the actions that have already been inscribed into the curatorial practice and a possible curatorial theory. It investigates the curator's role in the process of extracting meaning from the work of art, considering the layers of meanings that bridge the conceptual space between art and public. This chapter also offers a discussion on the development of the curatorial position and methods of exhibition organization, applying the case study of Alfred Barr in the Museum of Modern Art, New York as a counterpoint to Duchamp's experiments in curatorship. This discussion involves the shift from curator as the professional in charge of the care and selection of an art collection in an art institution to the curatorial practice, understood as a critical mediation.

Chapter 3 is about the substantial innovations that Duchamp bequeathed when he assisted the curatorial project of a permanent display of his own artworks at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and secretly entrusted his family with a curatorial guide to transfer his last artwork to that exhibition. The latter, *Étant Donnés* is considered a synthesis of his oeuvre and can also be seen as the summary of his curatorial strategies. Additionally, in chapter 3, I examined two examples of post-Duchampian art in transnational contexts. It starts by providing information about two Brazilian artists, Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles (b. 1948) whose artworks boast characteristics which are undoubtedly associated with what is presented as post-Duchampian art. This is the reason that their exhibitions, Hélio Oiticica in 2007 and Cildo Meireles in 2008 at the Tate Modern in London, were chosen as case studies. Hence, while introducing their oeuvres I discussed, in this section of chapter 3, the reference that each of these artists made to Duchamp. I provided evidence – published interviews and the artist's own texts – that both of them regarded Duchamp as a central figure whose legacy had affected their practices.

Duchamp's influence on these artists is discussed to clarify how they were associated with post-Duchampian art. Hélio Oiticica, for instance, was captivated by Duchamp's comprehension of the artworks' relationship with the space, environment and context, where the limits of an artistic manifestation do not end in its materiality (Oiticica, 1980). In the case of Cildo Meireles, the notion of the readymade definitely had an effect on the way he creates his own art (Meireles, 1999).

By reading Hélio Oiticica's journals, one can interpret that the Brazilian artist truly understood the change of paradigm that Duchamp implemented



in a more discerning manner than other artists from North America or Europe who claimed Duchamp as the father of contemporary art (Oiticica, 1986 and Justino, 1998). Hélio Oiticica's practice fomented the notion that the artwork is completed by the spectator who would, thus, become a 'participator' (Oiticica, 1986), similar to Duchamp's proposition. To clarify how choosing this case study can contribute to the thesis' aims, I demonstrated the importance of play to Hélio Oiticica and how this could be analysed as a post-Duchampian characteristic, as well as other features of his oeuvre, among them the issue of contextualization.

Furthermore, chapter 3 sheds light on the fact that Hélio Oiticica, like Duchamp in his artistic and curatorial practices, placed primordial significance on the encounter between artistic proposals and the public who would experiment with them. In this sense, Hélio Oiticica's art is seen as a challenge for curators (De Salvo, 2016). In order to transpose Oiticica's production to a completely different context, environment and also a distinctive time from what was documented as the inception of his artistic project, one would benefit from the knowledge or the *modus operandi* that Duchamp's curatorial practice could provide. The argued hypothesis is that Duchamp's curatorial strategy, represented in his curatorial testament, could be useful to this transposition. Thus, a greater awareness of a Duchampian curatorial practice could have availed the 2007 exhibition in London.

I applied the same type of approach when investigating Cildo Meireles' solo retrospective. I began quoting the numerous references to Duchamp found in Meireles' writings and interviews. This last part of chapter 3 also reveals Cildo Meireles' attentiveness to the public's experience, with an emphasis on the mental and sensorial operations that his artworks engender. Although the viewer may experience an aesthetic impulse to contemplate Cildo Meireles artworks' careful combination of materials, they go beyond what Duchamp called 'retinal art', that is, an artistic manifestation that functions more through its visual stimulus than its cognitive provocations. They produce a reflection, a kind of thought, that does not rely upon a sensorial impression. Cildo Meireles, throughout his trajectory, establishes a production characterised by the harmonious co-existence of sensorial seduction and cerebral provocation.

Thus, this set of attributes, among others – explained in chapter 3 – such as the use of verbal language as a trigger to the aesthetic experience common to Duchamp and Cildo Meireles, explains the option of choosing the Brazilian artist's 2008 show as an event to be examined from a post-Duchampian

perspective. In this case study, curating can enable the construction of knowledge targeted by Cildo Meireles when his artworks encounter the public in an exhibition space. Moreover, the weight and gravity that Cildo Meireles extends from the artwork's nucleus to the space in which the artwork is exhibited, are a reason to pick this particular show as a second and counterpoint case study. By breaking down the details of examples of Cildo Meireles' installations at Tate Modern, I argued that his artworks are laden with own memories and narratives that are not adjacent, but constitutive elements of their artistic project. Thus, in the exhibition environment, it is also a challenge to rearrange these elements that carry within themselves aspects of the context from which they emerged.

To better illustrate the complex task of curating in a transnational context, and in this way clarify the importance of these two case studies and how they are invaluable for the main argument of this thesis, it is worth to observing the words written by the curator Aneta Szyłak when reflecting on the subject of curating context:

I am considering curating context not as a site-specific adornment or a display of local discoveries, but as a way of activating a context and subsequently changing what we think this context is all about. What I want to address here is not the activity of making exhibitions – setting up artworks for display, for example – but rather setting a friction between them and with their surroundings. (2013, p.452)

She asserts that context is a recognizable existing condition that should be activated by curating and that the 'relations between things, thoughts, subjects and spaces goes beyond the staging of research on art or presenting artworks.' (Szyłak, 2013, p.462). In brief, the author's definition of context and curating in such conditions is:

Context is something that we tend to perceive as a frame but in fact, context is not fixed; its edges are blurred, its texture rich and folded. It is there as a pre-existing order, a surrounding condition (physical, economic, historical, visual, textual and/or political) and yet it has palimpsestic aspects. Context is a reservoir of knowledge that only comes to the fore with a curatorial practice. Concomitantly, practice is a reaction to the visible and invisible specificity of the surroundings and occurs as a mode of inhabitation, making the context (whether we belong to it or not) vibrant and active. (Szyłak, 2013, p.464).

Thus, the two Brazilian artists' exhibitions at Tate Gallery in London are examples in which the curatorial practices are undertaken as a 'proposal that sets questions in regard to space and time' (Szyłak, 2013, p.459). They are discussed as case studies that deal with the questions: How to present a work of art whose meanings dwell outside the work of art itself? How to exhibit again, in a different context – a different place and time from its first unveiling – a work of art that is constituted by an idea or a process as opposed to an object? Chapter 3 deals with the historiography of exhibitions and the methodological principles concerning the undertaking of a curatorial project, with an emphasis on their implications for curatorial practices in a transnational displacement.

This thesis is therefore a historical-critical research with experimental components. It is curious to note, as a last comment, that in the action of examining post-Duchampian art to forge what would be a better curatorial practice for this kind of artistic manifestation, I actually found in Duchamp's activities as curator the key premises about this theme which was the issue that initiated my research. Some of the answers that I sought, when I first started this work, were actually, by the end, being provided by the investigation into Duchamp's exhibitions. I like to believe that they were there waiting to be decoded.

After the introductions were made and I have presented the motto, questions and hypothesis that compose this thesis, I used the pronoun 'we'. As a meta-language gesture, due to the Duchampian principle that it is the viewer who completes the work of art and it is the 'spectator' who determines the weight of the work on the aesthetic scale, I would also like to shape this thesis, that is the result of lengthy academic research, by inviting the reader to assemble with me the writing which unfolds here. Herein, we will mean you (the reader) and myself (the researcher), who from now on, will be accompanied by Duchamp, his peers, thinkers, writers, art historians, curators and artists from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to our contemporaneity.

# **Chapter 1:**

# **The impact of**

# **Marcel Duchamp**

# **on the transition in**

# **contemporary art**

Deserved attention has been given to Duchamp's bequest in terms of transitions in art making. Ever since Duchamp was alive and attained considerable reputation within the art scene – firstly in the United States<sup>1</sup> – his oeuvre has been used to demonstrate his influential innovative ideas throughout a vast number of theoretical, critical and artistic writings that argue his relevance within contemporary art. Regarding this fact, the first few lines of *The Duchamp Book* exemplify his influence:

Well before the end of the twentieth century, the reputation and work of Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) had surpassed those of Picasso in the eyes of art historians, artists and Duchamp's admirers alike, as exemplifying all that we think of when we consider the prototypical life and work of the avant-garde artist. We are now accustomed to thinking of Duchamp as one of the first to challenge the idea of painting as the premier medium for innovative art and pioneer in widening immeas-

1 As Cabbanne reminds us in this passage: 'In November 1954, Duchamp and Teeny spent three months in Paris. Duchamp was still more or less unknown in France, and his visit went virtually unnoticed. This anonymity does not seem to have bothered him. He was used to leading a clandestine existence in the French capital. When he did show some of his "things" there, the strongest reaction they provoked was amusement. However, in New York, his fame was about to undergo a resurgence thanks to Neo-Dada and the emergence of the commonplace object as a form of expression. As a result, Duchamp would soon find himself acclaimed as the precursor of what was perhaps the greatest artistic revolution of the second half of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century'. (Cabbanne, 1997, p.162)

urably the choice of media available to the artist to work in. (Parkinson, 2008, p.6)

The following quotation serves as starting point for the argument and a link to the principle theme to be developed at this beginning of this thesis: the revelation of a new order within contemporary art based on Duchamp's propositions:

For Duchamp, nothing fits a priori into a fixed context. The order of things is neither established, regulated, certain, nor above all definitive. The elements of this world are not linked together like the letters in handwriting by some subjective and relatively rational scheme but follow each other indifferently, juxtaposed like the kinds of type used in printing presses. It is up to the typesetter to group them in a given order and so much the better, says Duchamp, if the foreman is drunk or inattentive, or if an accident jumbles the type and mixes up the composition. (Sanoillet, 1973, p. 9)

First published in 1958, the introduction of the book *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (1973), a compendium of texts written by the artist, led its editor Michel Sanoillet to remark, perhaps in an overtly poetic style, on what deciphered the genuine manner of how the Frenchman who once was an artist and then a (chess) player saw the world. Endowed with a visionary sense, Sanoillet's words reveal how the dynamics of Duchamp's ideas activated a new approach towards the order of things. Curiously, more than one decade later, the phrase 'the order of things' would be the title of the English version of the seminal book by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses*<sup>2</sup>, which if it had only depended on the preference of its author would be also called *L'Ordre des Choses* in its original. In his writing, Foucault investigates our perception of the world and how the perception of reality has been changing since the advent of the Enlightenment leading to the loss of meaning<sup>3</sup> that we currently experience nowadays. Foucault argued:

2 According to the publisher's note in the English edition, in order to avoid any confusion the book did not receive the title *L'Ordre des Choses* [the order of things] because the phrase had already been used by other authors. The full original title in French thus became *Les Mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*.

3 'Loss of meaning' indicates an erosion of the unequivocal semantic meaning that used to accompany objects in the perception process forged by the modern world. Later in this thesis we will explore the changes carried out by the substitution of this modern unequivocal meaning for the dialogical and ephemeral construction of the meaning observed in our era. It is this transition from modern to dialogical discourse that is referred to here as 'loss of meaning'.

This new arrangement brought about the appearance of a new problem, unknown until then: in the sixteenth century, one asked oneself how it was possible to know that a sign did in fact designate what it signified; from the seventeenth century, one began to ask how a sign could be linked to what it signified. A question to which the Classical period was to reply by the analysis of representation; and to which modern thought was to reply by the analysis of meaning and signification. But given the fact itself, language was never to be anything more than a particular case of representation (for the Classics) or of signification (for us). The profound kinship of language with the world was thus dissolved. The primacy of the written word went into abeyance. And that uniform layer, in which the seen and the read, the visible and the expressible, were endlessly interwoven, vanished too. (Foucault, 2002, p.47)

Not only simply due to an opportune coincidence of statements but above all for its adequacy in understanding transformations in culture, Foucault's text will be used as the theoretical framework of this research in order to deal with the shift in the understanding of art and more broadly modernity itself.

In this respect, this first chapter has as objective to identify the conditions that allowed Duchamp to conceive his theories regarding art and consequently reorganize a new order of the world through new language techniques. Duchamp's legacy will be considered within the theoretical frame inscribed in contemporaneity departing from Foucault's postulations but also incorporating Zygmunt Bauman's elucidation regarding the state of art after the collapse of modern thought. Bauman's interpretation of contemporary art will be used as a counterpoint to the lack of a cohesive definition for the term. Finally, it will be vital to take into consideration the large numbers of writers who published about the artist and of course Duchamp's own writings and interviews.<sup>4</sup>

4 We can mention, for instance, the famous and out of print publication *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (Schwarz, 1997); the anthology *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* (Kuenzli and Naumann, 1989); *Marcel Duchamp* (Ade et al. 1999); and the summarized critical review: *The Duchamp Book* (Parkinson, 2008). This study has also benefited immensely from primary sources such as *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (Cabanne, 1971); *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (Sanouillet and Peterson, 1973); *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp* (Naumann and Obalk, 2000), and *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews* (Tomkins, 2013).

## 1.1 AESTHETIC PROPOSITIONS ENGENDERED BY DUCHAMP

The number of aesthetic propositions engendered by Duchamp and that were unique in his time are vast, almost a model for the future, although the quantity of works of art that he made is not that large. In comparison with other great 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, Duchamp is the author of a small number of artworks. Names like Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) produced thousands of paintings, in addition to thousands of graphic prints and hundreds of sculptures and ceramics. Duchamp, in turn, created only 13 readymades, his *Large Glass* took eight years to be finalized and in 1946 he said that he had definitely stopped making art, but was actually working on *Étant Donnés* that took 20 years to complete.

During his youth, following a pattern in his family of artists, he painted much more frequently and even experimented in some French art styles in vogue at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism<sup>5</sup>, but he drastically diminished his production in painting at age 25, in 1912, because he noticed a certain unease in the pictorial medium, a feeling it no longer fulfilled his artistic aspirations. Therefore, a brief compendium of his seminal artworks shall begin after that with *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2* (1912) the ultimate painting that initiated his turning point as an artist.

The number '2' on the title of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* is due to the fact that there was a preliminary study from 1911 that was painted on cardboard. Both are in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's collection. Tomkins (2005) suggested that there was a very first version that disappeared. It was a drawing made on wood that could be the first plane in perspective for the other seminal work the *Large Glass*. In this thesis we will refer to this painting (the second and most famous version) as *Nude Descending a Staircase* of merely *Nude*.

From there, it shall also list his artwork in which he played with chance, the most prominent being *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913, figure 7) that Duchamp once said he considered to be the most important of his artworks:

As far as date is concerned, I would say the *3 Standard Stoppages* of 1913. That was really when I tapped the mainspring of my future. In itself it was not an important work of art, but for me it opened the way – the way to escape from those traditional methods of expression long associated with art' (Molderings, 2010, p. XI)

5 According to the interview that Duchamp gave to the TV channel BBC in 1968.



Figure 7  
 3 stoppages étalon (3 Standard Stoppages)  
 Duchamp, M. (1913)  
 Available at:  
<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-3-stoppages-etalon-3-standard-stoppages-t07507>  
 (Accessed 15 October 2016)  
 Wood, glass and paint on canvas.  
 400 x 1300 x 900 mm (displayed)

Soon after, in 1914, there came to be, or came to be chosen, the first readymade: the Bicycle Wheel (figure 8) and the Bottle Rack (figure 9) that were begotten by Duchamp before the concept of readymade, or better saying, the name that designated this artistic proposition was conceived (it came to Duchamp's mind in 1915, with *In Advance of the Broken Arm*). In the same year, he delivered the Box of 1914 (figure 10) that was composed of notes and drawings of projects in progress. Later, the conception of boxes will evolve from the *The Green Box* (1934, figure 11) to the *Boîte-en-valise* (figure 12) that he started in 1935, a portable museum of the same artist, a compendium of miniaturized artworks itself.

Speaking of drafting a strategic inventory of Duchamp's works it is indispensable to include *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* or the *Large Glass*, that took from 1915 to 1923 to be fashioned. In 1915, there was the rejection of the *Fountain* signed by R. Mutt. In 1919, the concept of readymade was





Figure 8  
Bicycle Wheel  
Duchamp, M. (1913)  
Available at:  
<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/59928.html?mulR=453761471|1>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)  
Wheel, painted wood  
Diameter: 64.8 cm  
Base height: 59.7 cm



Figure 9  
Bottle Rack  
Duchamp, M. (1914)  
Available at:  
<http://nga.gov.au/international/catalogue/Detail.cfm?IRN=44875>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)



Figure 10  
Box of 1914  
Duchamp, M. (1913-1914)  
Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/86183.html?mulR=2102253353|1#>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)  
Commercial cardboard photographic supply box containing photographic facsimiles of sixteen manuscript notes and the drawing *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun* (*Avoir l'apprenti dans le soleil*) mounted on mat boards, and one photographic facsimile of the drawing *Médiocrité* (*Mediocrity*), unmounted 25.7 x 19.1 x 3.8 cm



Figure 11

*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Green Box)*

Duchamp, M. (1934)

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51727.html?mulR=489988071|1#>

(Accessed 15 October 2016)

Ninety-four facsimiles of manuscript notes, drawings, and photographs, and one original manuscript item, *Broyeuse de Chocolat*, contained in a green flocked cardboard box

33.2 x 27.9 x 2.5 cm



Figure 12

Box in a Valise (*Boîte-en-Valise*) from or by Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy (*de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy*)

Duchamp, M. (1935-1941, 1963-1965 [contents])

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/89071.html?mulR=205944465|1>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)

Red leather valise containing various media on various supports: collotype, relief halftone, screenprint, offset lithograph, photograph with surface coating, printed color and hand coloring on paper, cardboard, clear acetate, vinyl, glass, and ceramic

41.3 x 38.4 x 9.5 cm

already insured and far from being merely the appropriation of mass-produced objects named art by the artist. Duchamp created *Paris Air* (figure 13), the attempt to make air a work of art and *L.H.O.O.Q.* (figure 14), the pun of words and mixing genders that used an art history canon as protagonist. The list could go on and encompass his endeavour to be an entrepreneur trying to sell his invention named *Rotorelief* (figure 15) at a gadget fair. At his stand in 1920 these spin disks made from cardboard illustrated with optical shapes did not attract buyers, but later they featured in Duchamp's investment in *(Anémic)cinema* in 1926. One can also tally his venture in gambling, *Monte Carlo Bond* (1924, figure 16) with his and Rose Sélavy's signature<sup>6</sup>, one of the first made from/to his female alter ego. The list could continue until the moment when Duchamp announced that he was doing nothing, but in the fact, he was performing many collaborations and contributions within the art world. However, in order to finalize this systematic compendium, it should culminate in *Étant Donnés: 1. La chute d'eau 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (*Given: The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas*) an installation at the Philadelphia Museum that was exposed for view after his death.

Despite being produced in diverse mediums, the exercise of thinking about a concise compilation of seminal artworks brought forth by Duchamp highlights that all of them have a revealing coherency. It is pointless to state which would be the major one, however all of them contain a set of ideas that



Figure 13  
50 cc of *Paris Air*  
Duchamp, M. (1919)  
Available at:  
<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51617.html?mulR=1959151010|1>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)  
Glass ampoule (broken and later restored)  
13.3 cm

<sup>6</sup> In Duchamp's oeuvre, one can find two spellings for his female alter ego: Rose Sélavy or with the double 'R', Rose Sélavy, this one is related to a pun of words that Duchamp made to sound like 'Eros c'est la vie'. In this thesis we will use the double R spelling.





Figure 14  
L.H.O.O.Q.  
Duchamp, M. (1919)  
Available at: [https://www.nga.gov/images/decor/dadainfo\\_fs.shtm](https://www.nga.gov/images/decor/dadainfo_fs.shtm)  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)  
Rectified readymade: pencil on reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*  
19.7 x 12.4 cm



Figure 15  
Rotoreliefs  
Duchamp, M. (1935)  
Photo from the 1965 edition





Figure 16  
 Monte Carlo Bond  
 Duchamp, M. (1924)



constitute the same core, a pulsing core of ideas, which will reverberate within the art field and in the changing of paradigm in art. This thesis will take on these reverberations that are still in motion and continue affecting contemporary art. As the art historians Ades, Cox and Hopkins acknowledged:

In the case of Duchamp, it is not only the works he produced themselves that have had an effect but also his whole attitude to art, the artist and the institutions of art. He posed basic questions concerning both the definition and the survival of art in the twentieth century. (Ades, Cox & Hopkins, 1999, p.6)

Among the objectives of this study is the promotion of a greater understanding of contemporary artwork. To achieve this aim, it will be fundamental to scrutinize some of Duchamp's works, or to be more specific, propositions. Ultimately, he defined himself as a 'breather' who was too 'lazy' to work, as the artist said:

I like living, breathing, better than working (...) Therefore, if you wish, my art would be that of living: each second, each breath is a work which is inscribed nowhere, which is neither visual nor cerebral. It's a sort of constant euphoria. (Cabanne, 1971, p.72)

Above all, Duchamp's favourite activity was to play chess, to be a player. A player in the field of art we might also say. For this reason, his artworks will appear in the body of this writing according to their relevance to what will be analysed. Duchamp's creations can be seen as an infinite source of analysis for a diversity of subjects, where sometimes the same work of art or the same piece of information is in a constant interplay between being a mystery to be solved and the possible answer to a puzzle. At this point, it is important in this preclusive appointment of ideas, to describe the conceptual structure of the readymades:

A conceptual view of art has various strands and sources in Duchamp's work and writings. Of most lasting impact have been questions raised by the readymades and their offshoots, the rejection of painting as a privileged artistic activity and the withdrawal from an art career as a profession. (Ades, Cox & Hopkins, 1999, p.7)

Duchamp's memories, witnesses' testimonies and conjoint versions heard over the years revealed the now iconic story around the porcelain urinal submitted to the Society of Independent Artist's 1917 exhibition. Betancourt (no date) attempts to examine the validity of the facts around *Fountain* and its

‘many different narratives’ that sometimes speculate that the disappeared piece was broken, sold or stolen. He indicates contradictions among versions presented by participants of the event. Some of these narratives were recovered 30 years later, as for example, Beatrice Wood who presented variations in her recollections. Another example is the mysterious commissioned photograph by Stieglitz, where and when it was taken is unknown, that allowed the improvable speculation that the piece was shown in Stieglitz’s gallery in New York for few days. At the end, he concludes:

Instead, what is required in this situation is a history which includes the contradictions and confusions rather than attempts to minimize them in favour of a coherent narrative. This type of history may not be a conclusive one, but in cases such as *Fountain*, it does give us a more accurate grasp of the situation in all its complexities. (...) The very nature of the stories surrounding *Fountain* suggest that what we are examining is not so much a historical object, as a mythological one. (Betancourt, n.d, paragraph 16)

Nowadays, the name of Duchamp is constantly related to the urinal, the infamous piece that was never shown and became one of the most discussed art objects in 20<sup>th</sup> century art theory<sup>7</sup>. However, when Duchamp and his friends Beatrice Wood and Henri-Pierre Roché<sup>8</sup> edited the magazine *The Blind*

7 The urinal is the first image related to the word ‘Duchamp’ that appears when using internet search engines, besides this fact other examples of how the authorship of *Fountain* is well-known nowadays are that the 1960’s replicas of the piece illustrate covers of monographic books on Duchamp. According to Filipovic (2008) though, the real authorship of the *Fountain* was fully opened to the public when the artist introduced a miniature of *Fountain* in his *Boîte-en-valise* between 1934 and 1941.

8 Duchamp met the American Beatrice Wood (1893-1998) in New York in 1916 and they became life-long friends. She had an extraordinary long and active life, being involved with American and French artistic circles throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Due to her connection to the New York Dada she received the alias ‘Mama of Dada’. When she met Duchamp she was an aspiring actress. Duchamp introduced her to the French writer and art critic and one of his best friends, Henri-Pierre Roché (1879-1959). The three became inseparable for some years while Roché was in New York. Both encouraged Wood to try a career in Visual Art as well. She made a few artworks and even submitted an assemblage to the Society of Independent Artist’s in 1917 but it was only much later that she devoted herself to ceramics, mastering and innovating the medium. Roché met Duchamp also in 1916 and they started a friendship that kept them in touch for the rest of their lives. He encouraged and financially supported some of Duchamp’s endeavours such as the *Rotoreliefs* (1953). The critic recognition of Roché’s writings just came later in his life with the two novels: *Jules et Jim* (1953) and *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* (1956). It has been said that the first was based on the relationship between Wood, Duchamp and Roché, but actually, the narrative is far from being similar to the relationship between the trio. Nevertheless, the last draft for a novel that Roché left unfinished when he died and that he wished to name Victor, the nickname that he called Duchamp, was a clear reference to the artist. Accordingly to Naumann and Obalk: ‘He [Roché] welcomed the opportunity to write about Duchamp, and did so in a series of articles (1953-1955), including one where he perceptively observed: “His [Duchamp’s] finest work is his use of time.”’ (2000, p.57)

Man (figures 17 and 18) publishing comments about the event, nobody knew yet who was behind the defiant piece sent to the exhibition. The second issue of the Dadaist magazine, (the first was on the day of the exhibition's opening, the second and last issue was launched one month later) brought a photo of the disappeared *Fountain* taken by the American photographer Alfred Stieglitz on the fourth page. On the following page, an article with no authorship titled *Richard Mutt Case* argued in defence of the legality of the object as a work of art in a show with no juries and no awards. There, the inception of the readymade was written in bold and had the verb 'chose' in capital letters:

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He **CHOSE** it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object. (*The Blind Man*, 1917, p.5)

Rather than be content with the act of creating something, which already determines the main peculiarity of an artistic process, Duchamp created a new manner of art making by selecting an object and provoking a change in its meaning through context displacement. Even with the stress on the fact that the artist **CHOSE** it, the second gesture that is the presentation of the object in a different environment is also of utmost significance. The act of moving something from its usual place to a distinct one inaugurates a new set of associations between its own function and meaning in relation to the context and condition that it was displaced from. The 'discovery of the readymade' also proved that the nature of things depends extremely on its surroundings and this is the same for the nature of the art object. The readymades make it clear that any object makes some sense within the milieu in which it resides.

The readymade strategy that points to the context in which it is involved can also be understood in broader operations of Duchamp's work. In this thesis, the Duchampian manoeuvre will also be examined in the realm of curatorial practice where his legacy was very innovative and must be studied. In addition, the importance of his production as an artist, his achievements as a thinker and exhibition-organiser have been crucial to the current discussion regarding curatorial practice: an area of knowledge currently full of vitality due to the fact that it is still not fully determined.

Fountain by R. Mutt

Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz



THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS

Figure 17  
The Blind Man Magazine

# THE BLIND MAN

## *The Richard Mutt Case*

*They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.*

*Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.*

*What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:—*

- 1. Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.*
- 2. Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.*

*Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.*

*Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.*

*As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.*

## **"Buddha of the Bathroom"**

I suppose monkeys hated to lose their tail. Necessary, useful and an ornament, monkey imagination could not stretch to a tailless existence (and frankly, do you see the biological beauty of our loss of them?), yet now that we are used to it, we get on pretty well without them. But evolution is not pleasing to the monkey race; "there is a death in every change" and we monkeys do not love death as we should. We are like those philosophers whom Dante placed in his Inferno with their heads set the wrong way on their shoulders. We walk forward looking backward, each with more of his predecessors' personality than his own. Our eyes are not ours.

The ideas that our ancestors have joined together let no man put asunder! In *La Dissociation des Idées*, Remy de Gourmont, quietly analytic, shows how sacred is the marriage of ideas. At least one charm-

ing thing about our human institution is that although a man marry he can never be *only* a husband. Besides being a money-making device and the *one* man that *one* woman can sleep with in legal purity without sin he may even be as well some other woman's very personification of her abstract idea. Sin, while to his employees he is nothing but their "Boss," to his children only their "Father," and to himself certainly something more complex.

But with objects and ideas it is different. Recently we have had a chance to observe their meticulous monogomy.

When the jurors of *The Society of Independent Artists* fairly rushed to remove the bit of sculpture called the *Fountain* sent in by Richard Mutt, because the object was irrevocably associated in their atavistic minds with a certain natural function of a secretive sort. Yet to any "innocent" eye

Figure 18  
The Blind Man Magazine

The shift from curator as the professional in charge of the care and selection of an art collection in an art institution to so-called curatorial practice, understood as a critical mediation between production and presentation, is an issue that persists as a territory to be mapped. Duchamp's contribution not only as art maker but as a curator and an exhibition organiser sheds light on the range of possibilities revealed by contemporary curatorial practice. Crucial themes for the study of this practice such as the corporification of the exhibition experience and the emergence of the context in which the exhibition takes place are topics within Duchamp's legacy, and they will be discussed at depth later in this thesis.

The corporification of the exhibition experience as we shall examine in chapter 2 is one of the hypotheses of the studies regarding Duchamp's curatorial work. A brief explanation can be glimpsed in Filipovic words:

At the newly organized modern museums and display spaces, so in vogue in Paris in the 1930s, the spectator was choreographed to keep a safe distance, to look disinterestedly, and to forget his or her body. Duchamp, on the other hand, seemed to want to make explicit that vision's condition of possibility is the approach of the body—that vision is decidedly *corporeal*. (Filipovic, 2008, p.88)

Meanwhile, since we will analyse how contexts will influence the creation and experience of art, it is important to clarify the historical context and artistic thinking paradigm in which the ideas of Duchamp flourished and how his ideas were dissonant to his peers. In a moment when artists were seeking for a sense of completeness and certainty, Duchamp bet on pluralism and indeterminacy. When artists were emphasising a new form of representation that would reflect the moment where they lived, Duchamp was incorporating the moment in which the art was created to its presentation. Or even, when Modernism draws attention in its aesthetic dimension to its own condition, a painting of whatever kind of theme, also questions a certain pictorial status or a sculpture questions sculptural structures, Duchamp was questioning art itself. Duchamp would be remarkable for initiating a period in which artists renounced unity of style and in which there is a breakdown of the art history composed by movements in which one follows another, targeting the same: a progress in arts. His legacy will be seminal for the new understanding of arts that we must have in the contemporary time.

## **1.2 THE INCONSONANT DEFINITIONS OF ART HISTORY AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF AVANT-GARDE**

Before going further in contextualizing the period when the ideas of Duchamp stirred up – and then, overthrew the current art establishment – in order to relocate his thought to the present, this thesis will raise some observations about the substance of art history to better define the terms that we shall use, particularly in regard to Modernism and Avant-garde.

Art history as a discipline has enabled the vision of the history of human creation via a synthetic formula. This is a crucial observation that exudes from the 1940 paper titled *The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline* which introduces the seminal book *The Meaning of the Visual Arts* by Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968). In this text, the German Art historian who developed standard methods to approach the discipline said:

Man is indeed the only animal to leave records behind him, for he is the only animal whose products ‘recall to mind’ an idea distinct from their material existence. Other animals use signs and contrive structures, but they use signs without ‘perceiving the relation of signification,’ and they contrive structures without perceiving the relation of construction. [...] Man’s signs and structures are records because, or rather in so far as they express ideas separated from, yet realized by, the processes of signalling and building. These records have therefore the quality of emerging from the stream of time, and it is precisely in his respect that they are studied by the humanist. He is, fundamentally, a historian. (Panofsky, 1991, p.23-24)

With the purpose of making clear the importance of art history as a humanistic discipline – emphasising it as a discipline in itself – Panofsky also made visible the impact that artistic production has on the formation of human values, beliefs, creativity, and identity in diverse civilizations. He compared the procedures of natural sciences and the humanities, then, focusing specifically on art history, he discussed the process of conceptualizing artistic knowledge. Unlike other realms in the Humanities area, art history does not rely on highly scientific methods to categorize its subject of study. History, for example, deals with events that ended in the past. It is true that these events can be subjected to layers of interpretations and they could be misinterpreted according to a privileged vision. However, certainly, a fact from the past cannot repeat itself again to

be re-examined or to be recovered in all its essence. Art history, instead, looks at artworks which are objects of study that carry emanating questions from their own past into the present.

In a dereistic manner it can be said that art history has the difficult mission of taming a wild living being, as art does not have an expiry date. It is hard – one would say, almost impossible – to comprehend and summarize all the artistic ideas that materialize and go out into the world. For this reason, as is postulated by Panofsky, art history is such a bold area and also due to possessing the aforementioned function, since studies on it began it has been configured in an interdisciplinary *modus operandi*, by imbibing its noesis on other sources of knowledge from philosophy to chemistry in order to reload the ‘intention’ of a work of art. The author named ‘archaeological research’ this specific art historical procedure to identify the date and location of a work of art by taking advantage of interdisciplinary tools. Panofsky reminds us that ‘The cosmos of culture, like the cosmos of nature, is a spatio-temporal structure.’ (Panofsky, 1991, p.26) and stated that the art historians’ job does not only depend on methodological objective research but they also need to ‘mentally re-enact the action and to re-create the creations’ (Panofsky, 1991, p.34). Both analytical operations should be combined in an organic situation:

The real answer lies in the fact that intuitive aesthetic re-creation and archaeological research are interconnected so as to form, again, what we have called an ‘organic situation’. It is not true that the art historian first constitutes his object by means of re-creative synthesis and then begins his archaeological investigation – as though first buying a ticket and then boarding a train. In reality the two processes do not succeed each other, they interpenetrate; not only does the re-creative synthesis serve as a basis for the archaeological investigation, the archaeological investigation in turn serves as a basis for the re-creative process; both mutually qualify and rectify one another. (Panofsky, 1991, p.35)

Art history has also shaped its own unique tools to serve its purpose as a scholarly discipline with this blending of analytical research. One method was to develop the theory of styles that consist of isolating groups of artworks that share the same characteristics and hierarchizing them. In a considered old school of art history, in which the object-based analysis is predominant, the discipline was even called the history of styles. The concept of style serves to em-



phasize and comprehend a whole group of artworks by different artists that are categorized under the same label<sup>9</sup>. It does have a pedagogical structure that allows the discipline to operate systematically. Nevertheless, the notion of style which sometimes is also known by the term 'movement', is not based on an objective definition as is placed by Panofsky:

Because of the fact that the objects of art history come into being by a process of re-creative aesthetic synthesis, the art historian finds himself in a peculiar difficulty when trying to characterize what might be called the stylistic structure of the works with which he is concerned. Since he has to describe these works, not as physical bodies or as substitutes for physical bodies, but as objects of an inward experience, it would be useless – even if it were possible – to express shapes, colours, and features of construction in terms of geometrical formulas, wave lengths and static equations, or to describe the postures of a human figure by way of anatomical analysis. (Panofsky, 1991, p. 40)

The truth is that the subject of art history, the so-called style, is a nominalism<sup>10</sup> that fractions the complex and prolific territory of the arts, and in doing so, favours its study. Although style was the backbone of art history, it is a concept made a posteriori and does not undeniably relate to the reality of the facts. The standardization is determined by the art historian's research that unveils and finds features that have an easily perceptible connection. We do not want to deny here the prevalence of art schools where a master teaches pupils who end up inheriting similar traces in their art making.

There is not a negation that arts discoveries or fashions are replicated by other artists. There is for sure a tangible condition in which styles are determinate as described by Panofsky:

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9 Normally in art history it is used as a 'way of characterizing relationships among works of art that were made at the same time and/or place, or by the same person or group' (Ackerman, 1962, p.227), however as is pointed out by Ackerman (1962) it is not unusual to see even in the art history academic realm the use of the concept as a very particular feature of an individual gesture. Ackerman also exemplifies: 'A particular work of art therefore may represent or exemplify characteristics of a style in the way that a person may be representative of a society, but to say that it "has a style," as we often do, is not illuminating' (Ackerman, 1962, p.228). The opposing usages of the term style denunciate its ambiguous connotation that in addition to its fickle definitions demonstrate the tricky ground on where it is structured.

10 In the Platonic Philosophical tradition, universal is an idea, or form, that is perfect and immutable, it does not depend on anything else to exist and for this reason it precedes language. According to Charles S. Peirce's definitions published in the Century dictionary, Nominalism is the opposite, being 'The doctrine that is general but names; more specifically, the doctrine that common nouns, as *man*, *horse*, represent in their generality nothing in the real things, but are mere conveniences for speaking of many things at once, or at most necessities of human thought; individualism.' (Houser & Kloesel ed., 1992, p.XXIV)

On the other hand, since the inward experience of the art historian is not a free and subjective one, but has been outlined for him by the purposeful activities of an artist, he must not limit himself to describing his personal impressions of the work of art as a poet might describe his impressions of a landscape or of the song of a nightingale. The objects of art history, then, can only be characterized in a terminology which is as re-constructive as the experience of the art historian is re-creative: it must describe the stylistic peculiarities, neither as measurable or otherwise determinable data, nor as stimuli of subjective reactions, but as that which bears witness to artistic 'intentions'. Now 'intentions' can only be formulated in terms of alternatives: a situation has to be supposed in which the maker of the work had more than one possibility of procedure, that is to say, in which he found himself confronted with a problem of choice between various modes of emphasis. Thus it appears that the terms used by the art historian interpret the stylistic peculiarities of the works as specific solutions of generic 'artistic problems'. (Panofsky, 1991, p.40)

This extract can be seen as advice taught by Panofsky that persuaded subsequent generations of art historians. Nonetheless, it was not always that this recommendation of how to explain an artistic style was followed straight away. Sometimes, forged by the manner it is described in, style becomes almost an entity, something impervious, constant and impenetrable. Now and then, as a movement it appears to be like a force that emerges from specific circumstances and controls the human making. Mindful of the effort to pave academic foundations for art history, it would be considered an inconsistent conviction if we consider style or movement as something that builds its own forms and becomes a proper adjective when all its features are definitive. These notions are also not in accordance with a scientific rigour when scholars make references to a superior or dominating style.

With these observations, this thesis imparts that it is in consonance to a critically understand of art history which calls the concept of style into question. It is not our objective here to go further in this debate but by posing these remarks we seek to establish the ground to the context in which Duchamp's art will unfold.

To know more about the current debate regarding the style dilemma see Persinger:

Giving style's entanglements with racial and national politics, it is not surprising that it has been one of art history's most embattled terms. In recent years, certain scholars have categorically reject style's place within the discipline by pointing to its unstable meaning, even questioning its status as a concept. It is true that those who have accepted style as a valid analytical tool have been unable to come to a consensus as to its definition. Schapiro's description of style as "a system of forms with a quality and meaningful expression through which the personality of the artist and the broad outlook of a group are visible" is only one of a few key definitions of the term in the 20th century. In 1968, E.H. Gombrich defined style as "any distinctive way in which an act is performed." James Elkins' somewhat pessimistic entry on the term in the Grove Dictionary of Art is a testament of the term's difficult nature. Elkins remarks that "The further the concept of style is investigated, the more it appears as an inherently partly incoherent concept, opaque to analysis." (Persinger, 2007, p.4)

In fact, the aim of this commentary is to pose a critique of the notion that styles or movements are artistic projects created with a conclusive propose. When art history is confounded with the history of styles, there is the willingness to establish relationship of cause and effect among the uncountable number of artistic expressions: a style or a movement that surpasses another. Often seen in museums or books is a timeline of artists and events designed to order the plethora of artistic creations that pullulates all aspects of civilization. This thought has a worthy educational aim but most of these artistic expressions mingle and cannot be distinguished or separated. Art history in this way is a realm that has been always been challenged by its own subject of analysis. The important point to grasp with this preceding explanation is that if there was a certain period in which the boundaries between artistic trends were extremely defined, this period is Modernism.

Before continuing, there is an ambivalence of the term Modern that must be free of doubt. In its etymology, 'Modern' is drawn from the Latin '*modo*' that means 'now existing'. The term, as an adjective, has been used by philosophers, historians and social researchers to describe what since the Enlightenment is considered the dominant thought. In the realm of culture though this adjective, as is mentioned above, will designate unforeseen experimentalism in Arts, Architecture, Literature and Music. For example, the American critic of art

Clement Greenberg used Modernism in an encapsulated form that would impose new expressions on the Western Culture. In his definition, Modernism is a period of self-criticism and when artists questioned art foundations.

Each art, it turned out, had to perform this demonstration on its own account. What had to be exhibited was not only that which was unique and irreducible in art in general, but also that which was unique and irreducible in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself. By doing so it would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of that area all the more certain. It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered 'pure,' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. 'Purity' meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance. (Greenberg, 1986, p.97)

This particular definition of Modernism implemented by Greenberg in the 1961 essay *Modernist Painting* became very acceptable among art researchers. He pointed out as Modernity's foundations the writings of the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), due to his being the pillar of strength of self-critical thinking. For this reason, for Greenberg, Modernism is a historically demarcated era. Modernity's most striking feature would be its tendency to self-critique using modernity itself as the instrument for this critique. Thus, we find ourselves facing a hermetic system that devours itself in search of understanding. In this way, its objective is not the subversion of the intellectual apparatus brought about by modernity, but to reinforce its potency. Kant, as a model of this process, 'used logic to establish the limits of logic' (Greenberg, 1986, p.96) but also used aesthetics to criticize the concept of beauty and strengthen the concepts of good and genius. At the end, this self-critical activity praises its objects in a sense that it criticizes from within. It is therefore, a step beyond a phenomenological analysis as this self-reflexive critique has as instrument of analysis the object's own internal processes, which makes the knowledge of their internal mechanisms necessary. Like modernity itself, Greenberg reminds us that this form of criti-

cism arises from the Enlightenment critique, but disassociates from this, since the Enlightenment follows the most accepted critique model, criticizing objects using external elements. While the Enlightenment qualified artistic activities as entertainment and therapy (Greenberg, 1986, p.96), Kantian Aesthetics finds its elements within art itself, giving rise to the concepts of 'good' (explored by Plato) and even more noticeable the concept of 'genius'. The latter is the conjunctive tissue of the Kantian theory of art, asserting that art emerges from the skill of creating something paradigmatically beautiful, without artists being able to explain how to make it.

For Greenberg, the self-reflection criticism that characterised Modern Art calculated new standards when judging the subject of its analysis: art itself. This self-criticism also delivers an acute view of the past, which allows modern artists to adapt their practice to the present time. There was also the desire for a self-definition. This was implied when Greenberg says that 'each art be rendered "pure,"', it means without being contaminated by other languages. In the case of painting, it resulted in a twist of its conventional functions such the Renaissance concept of the painting as an open window that sustains an illusionary reconstruction of the visible through the use of perspective. For him, the three-dimensional space was a matter that belongs to sculptural works, thus there was the inevitable abandonment of the virtual representation in painting. Greenberg asserted that the focus on the bi-dimensional plane as a proper painting's attribute was one of the reasons that painting in Modernism passed through a process of becoming flat and then abstract. It was, for him, an affirmation of its medium's principles.

Greenberg also complemented that 'Modernism used art to call attention to art' (1986, p.98). The self-definition and the greater understanding of the medium favoured a certain autonomy of the art, and then a desire for uniqueness and innovation emerged. Greenberg's view on Modernism reflects on the fact that modern artists pursued the novelty, new definitions, critiqued the past and decided to write rules and set new methods to guide art. It explains the desire for purity or certainty. Bearing in mind these premises commented by Greenberg, one assumes that in this the artists indeed gathered together to develop theories and elaborate a movement, a style that overthrew artistic traditions, calling attention to themselves and upholding an emancipatory identity. To endorse this affirmation, it is worth mentioning that another prominent art critic from the USA, Arthur Danto, called Modernism 'the Age of Manifestos', when art tries to

discover what it is. It is interesting to see how Danto describes the manifestos and how he states that modernism is no longer the actual context, which has not ended only in the minds of those who still believe in it.

But the deep truth of the historical present, it seems to me, lies in the Age of Manifestos being over because the underlying premises of manifesto-driven art is philosophically indefensible. A manifesto singles out the art it justifies as the true and only art, as if the movement it expresses had made the philosophical discovery of what art essentially is. But the true philosophical discovery, I think, is that there is really no art more true than any other, and that there is no one way art has to be: all art is equally and indifferently art. The mentality that expressed itself in manifestos sought in what is supposed was a philosophical way to distinguish real art from pseudo-art, much as, in certain philosophical movements, the effort was to find a criterion for distinguishing genuine questions from pseudo-questions. (Danto, 1997, p.34)

This was the perspective of Modernism predominant in arts. As aforementioned the term embraces more than what is understood in the realm of culture. The Brazilian scholar Lucia Santaella for instance (2003a), in a condensed explanation, says that modernity had its starting point with the capitalist mode of production.

There was the advent of modern science and philosophy, thus this period that lasted five centuries was marked by the rise of bourgeois economic and later political power. It is in modernity that Visual Arts, or more precisely the Fine Arts, having adjusted the concept to their related moment, were split into categories such as drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and architecture. Later on, the interlacement of such divisions and the denial of art movements in all aspects were sign of the deconstruction of modernity. The depletion of the modern values led to the replacement of solid modern categories for more flexible models, as can be seen:

The central values of modernity, the emphasis on science as a model of knowledge, the emphasis on the question of truth and knowledge, the importance of institutional policy, the formulation of large systems and theoretical frameworks, the task given to philosophy as a legitimising authority, all these elements are considered depleted and should be set aside for the sake of a type of knowledge that em-

phasizes creativity, inspiration and emotion, in which aesthetic values take the place of what is scientific and political in the traditional sense. (Marcondes, 2008, p.278)

For Zygmunt Bauman who wrote extensively about the decline of modern thought and whose view on contemporary art is extremely connected to the transformative period that this thesis undertakes, modernity was built on three pillars: beauty, cleanliness and order. Bauman explains these values based on Sigmund Freud's – one of the main thinkers of the Modern Era – 1930 book *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

modernity is about beauty ('this useless thing which we expect civilization to value'), cleanliness ('dirtiness of any kind seems to us incompatible with civilization') and order ('Order is a kind of compulsion to repeat which, when a regulation has been laid down once and for all, decides when, where and how a thing shall be done, so that in every similar circumstance one is spared hesitation and indecision'). (Bauman, 1998, p.2)

These three aspects ensured a project of civilization centred on security but lacking freedom. For Bauman the shift from Modernism to what in his analysis is called postmodernity does not mean<sup>11</sup>:

that the ideals of beauty, purity and order which sent men and women on their modern voyage of discovery have been forsaken, or lost any of

11 Postmodernity is a notion that appeared more than 50 years ago. (Coelho, 1995): 'Digging in history, searching for the crucial moment of a possible postmodern Big Bang, it is possible to admit that it is a centenary idea'. (Coelho, 1995, p.7) However, it was the French Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) who commenced the philosophical discussion regarding the term. 'Lyotard is not exactly a systematic critic of modernity, since postmodern thought does not seek to critique or a break away from modernity, but rather intends to surpass the methodology, epistemological principles and categories of thought instituted in modernity, including the very idea of criticism, searching new directions for thought'. (Marcondes, 2008, p. 278). In order to complete this historical framework of postmodernism it is appropriate here to backtrack further and affirm that in the North American context, 'the term had already been used in literary criticism in the 1950s by Irving Howe and Harry Levin [both American literary and social critics]. In the 1960s, it emphatically resurges in the literary critics works'. (Santaella, 2003a, pp.69-70). Bauman has written extensively about Postmodernity since the 1980s. In the 2010 preface for the Brazilian version of the book *Legislators and interpreters – On Modernity, Post-Modernity, Intellectuals*, he reviewed the meaning of the term, pointing out that it is a provisional alternative for a yet unresolved situation: 'In short, the main meaning of the idea of postmodernity is that it is something distinctive from modernity. It therefore shows that modernity is no longer our way of life, that the Modern Era is over, that we are now entering another way of life. However this idea has offered limited guidance about the identity of this "other way", of its own rules, its own logic and its defining characteristics. Because of these three deficiencies (the "negative" character, the indication of an end of modernity and the lack of information given regarding the attributes of this new way of life), the idea of "post-modernity" seemed to me from the beginning an interim solution to the dilemma. Without a doubt there is no satisfactory and much less a definitive solution to our issue.' (Bauman, 2010, p.11).

their original lustre. Now, however, they are to be pursued – and fulfilled – through individual spontaneity, will and effort. (Bauman, 1998, p.3)

Returning to Santaella, as Bauman alludes to Freud, she refers to Newton and Descartes<sup>12</sup> when mentioning some names of Modern minds. To indicate the key figures that enabled the deconstruction of Modernism she mentions Duchamp as a prime example of the ‘most radical, real bastions of derision for an entire universe of forms and values which had exercised its hegemony over the culture for centuries.’ (Santaella, 2003a, p. 107). Duchamp carried out an intellectually challenging venture in the realm of art, analogous to the one performed by Newton in the realm of science: that of creating a system, which in Foucauldian terms would be a grid as we will see later in this chapter. According to Flusser (2011), the invention of a new system or a new model happens when the validity of existing models is placed into question. The crisis of representation led Duchamp to propose a new language system for contemporary art. Duchamp’s readymades, that incorporate the rupture that tears the objects from their utilitarian function affirming their singularity as an artistic choice, are also the greatest examples of the new system that Duchamp created. A useful paradigm to understand this point is the readymade that Duchamp under the code-name R. Mutt tried to reveal to the public: *Fountain*, submitted to and rejected by the Society of Independent Artists, in 1917.

Bauman also situated *Fountain* as the beginning of the art that he called post-modernist as he points out:

By today’s standards, Duchamp’s gesture was not that iconoclast at all. On the other hand, it could be seen as such just because at that time definitions, theories and methods still counted on were perceived as the necessary conditions and paramount criteria of artistic judgement. There were dominant, agreed upon, universally accepted defi-

12 For instance, Flusser (2011) argues that the importance of Isaac Newton (1642 -1727) does not reside in the fact that this scientist substituted the Earth as the centre of the universe for the Sun and designed the Solar System in an ellipse instead of a perfect circle. There was no novelty in the changes that Newton introduced into Ptolomeu’s astronomical treatise that represented the most reliable cosmology in use from Antiquity to Renaissance times. Copernicus (1473-1543) had tried to apply a heliocentric system before and ended up being condemned by the Catholic Church. Following this thread, Newton’s importance, according to Flusser, lies in the fact that he ‘created a new model’, which inaugurated a never seen attitude and position in the history of human thinking. Rather than ‘discover the truth’ in the sense of revealing something that was hidden, Newton formulated a scheme to better understand the universe. The French René Descartes (1596 -1650) for his part can be considered the father of Modern thought with his 1637 *Discourse on the Method* and 1644 *Principles of Philosophy*. Since Descartes, observation, experimentation and checking hypothesis have become decisive procedures for Modern Science overcoming metaphysical argument and syllogisms (Marcondes, 2008).



nitions, theories and methods which Duchamp could be radically opposed to and defy. (Bauman, 2010, p.182)

It is undeniable that there were great changes in art language, incited by a wide range of audacious artists, in the period that extended from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the aftermath of the Second World War. Most of these changes followed the social transformations and the impact of the turbulent events that affected the world from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century like geopolitical revolutions and mechanical and technological development. Futurism, for instance – according to the Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan, is the first movement to be labelled as *vanguard*:

Deliberately prepare and announce a radical subversion of culture and even of social customs, negating the past in its entirety and replacing methodical research with a daring experimentation in the stylistic and technical order.’ (Argan, 1999, p.310)

This explicitly demonstrated this technological progress. Shortly after its first Manifesto by the novelist and playwright Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944) in 1909 that was largely related to poetry, literature and drama, there was the 1910 Manifesto of the Futurist Painters by the Italian painter Giacomo Balla, the sculptor Umberto Boccioni and others:

Comrades, we tell you now that the triumphant progress of science makes profound changes in humanity inevitable, changes which are hacking an abyss between those docile slaves of past tradition and us free moderns, who are confident in the radiant splendour of our future. (Danchev, 2011, p. 21)

It can be said that what the artists of the period had in common is that the majority were people who at a certain level transformed their particular art medium and/or artists that waved the flag of a specific movement. Primary examples are: Kazimir Malevich with his 1916 Suprematist Manifesto in which the real revolution is not the replacement of a decaying world by designing a new concept: ‘it is a world devoid of objects, concepts, past and future, a radical transformation in which object and subject are reduced to zero degrees.’ (Argan, 1999, p.324). Or other Manifestos such as the 1919 Manifesto of Suprematists and Non-Objective Painters signed by Aleksandr Rodchenko and others which gave great importance to a formal rigor not only in painting but in politics and

culture; or the Realistic Manifesto by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner<sup>13</sup> in 1920 that proclaimed the pure form of Constructivism; or even the numerous Dada Manifestos such as the Dada Cannibalistic Manifesto by Duchamp's closest friend Francis Picabia in 1920; or the first Surrealist Manifesto written by another of Duchamp's peers André Breton<sup>14</sup> in 1924. Nevertheless, in view of the modifications within the historical panorama that is advocated here, Duchamp has been recognized as the figure who transposed art to what is known as contemporary art.

The fact that the pursuit of a comprehensive explanation for the term 'contemporary art' does not always result in precise answers must be taken into account. For instance, in the survey entitled *A Companion of Contemporary Art Since 1945* its editor, Amelia Jones, encounters in the predictable use of 'contemporary art' defined by a chronological evaluation of events, a manner in which to bring together a series of themes. She argues:

Contemporary art can be understood, of course, as any work produced in the context of official visual arts institutions and discourses in Europe and the US (and, increasingly, beyond) in the post-WWII period'. (Jones, 2006, p. 14)

Furthermore, that a variety of views about what constitutes contemporary art should be considered, to therefore embrace 'a varied and heterogeneous range of characteristics associated with art made since 1945' (Jones, 2006, p.14). In counterpoint, Danto disagrees and offers a sharper observation: 'Just as "modern" is not simply a temporal concept, meaning, say, "most recent," neither is "contemporary" merely a temporal term, meaning whatever is taking place at the present moment.' (Danto, 1997, p. 9)

13 The artists cited are: the Russians Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935), Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956), Naum Gabo (1890–1977) and his older brother Antoine Pevsner (1886–1962).

14 Special attention must be given to these last two artists: The French-born abstract painter Francis Picabia (1879–1953) was considered by Duchamp 'the greatest exponent of freedom in art' and also a preeminent painter. Duchamp invested in him by buying his paintings (Naumann and Obalk, 2000, p. 58). It is assumed that they both had a great deal of influence on each other. Machinist aesthetics, which was one of Duchamp's very first interests, was further developed and theorized by Picabia, and it was Picabia who was key in persuading Duchamp to live in New York, where he would find freshness in art. The French poet André Breton (1896 – 1966) was the leader of Surrealism that was in first instance an artistic programme dissident of the Parisian Dada Movement. In 1924, he wrote the *Manifeste du Surrealisme*; *Poisson soluble* in which he proclaimed 'Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected association, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all, all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.' (1924 cited in Hofmann, 2001). He was a frank admirer of Duchamp. Although Duchamp had never taken part in the Surrealist movement, Breton invited him to participate in many Surrealist events as we will see further on in this thesis.

Another example to give a dimension of how the question ‘what is contemporary art?’ has been pursued is demonstrated by Hal Foster in the article titled *Contemporary Extracts*. Foster’s conclusions about the issue were the outcome of a questionnaire that the author distributed among North American and European art historians, curators and theorists which contained many questions regarding contemporary art<sup>15</sup>. Firstly, Foster affirms that the classification does not represent something new, however ‘what is new is the sense that, in its very heterogeneity, much present practice seems to float free of historical determination, conceptual definition, and critical judgement.’ (Aranda, Woodv & Vidokle, 2010, p.142). Subsequently, the scholar says that it is a term defined by its usage within the academia, museum and art institutions contexts to compass a combination of art practice descriptions. Then, he listed over ten extracts – that attempt to bring definitions but sometimes carried more questions than answers to the theme<sup>16</sup> – that he had received in response to his enquiry, giving the impression that the term is used according to its convenience instead of consisting of a unified explanation that would encompass all its significance.

Again taken from its etymology ‘contemporary’ represents the addition of ‘co’ (together) and ‘temporary’ (temporal, lasting a short period) it serves to qualify those who are together in the same period of time. Similarly to the idea of Modernism, contemporary contrives the notion of a certain freshness in the moment without clarifying exactly which moment it is. Danto’s elucidation for this similarity between the terms is worth quoting in its entirety:

For a long time, I think, ‘contemporary art’ would have been just the modern art that is being made now. Modern, after all, implies a difference between now and ‘back then’: there would be no use for the expression if things remained steady and largely the same. It implies an historical structure and is stronger in this sense than a term like ‘most recent’. ‘Contemporary’ in its most obvious sense means simply what is happening now: contemporary art would be the art produced

15 The questionnaires were later published in *October* magazine, 130, Fall 2009. Hal Foster’s essay is part of the 2010 book *What Is Contemporary Art?* edited by Aranda, J., Wood, B. & Vidokle, A. which is the result of a conference around this question. The book also brings essays from more eleven international art theorists like Cuauhtémoc Medina, Boris Groys and Hans Ulrich Obrist, upon the same theme.

16 For example, Miwon Kwon an art historian based in Los Angeles began his answer saying: ‘Contemporary art history sits at a crossroads in the uneven organization of the subfields that comprise the discipline of art history.’ Or, Tim Griffin, at the time, editor-in-chief of *Artforum* magazine based in New York wrote ‘The potential irony of contemporary art is that by signalling its stand apart, this art actually articulates itself as another niche with the broader cultural context – as just one more interest among so many others.’ (Aranda, J., Wood, B. & Vidokle, A. 2010, p. 144 and p. 149).

by our contemporaries. It would not, clearly, have passed the test of time. But it would have a certain meaning for us which even modern art which had passed that test would not have: it would be 'our art' in some particularly intimate way. But as the history of art has internally evolved, contemporary has come to mean an art produced within a certain structure of production never, I think, seen before in the entire history of art. So just as 'modern' has come to denote a style and even a period, and not just recent art, 'contemporary' has come to designate something more than simply the art of the present moment. In my view, moreover, it designates less a period than what happens after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art, and less a style of making art than a style of using styles. Of course, there is contemporary art in styles of a kind never before seen, but I do not want to press the matter at this stage of my discussion. I merely wish to alert the reader to my effort to draw a very strong distinction between 'modern' and 'contemporary'. (Danto, 1997, p.10)

Having an increasing historical distance of what was the cultural complex that aroused from the modernization, it is possible to moderate its features. Nonetheless, with regard to the idea of what being contemporary means and particularly contemporary art, we can find in the ideas diffused by Bauman an instructive notion of contemporary which is very appropriate for outlining post-Duchampian aesthetics.

Contemporary art, on the other hand, is no longer concerned with 'representing'; it assumes no more that the truth which needs to be captured by the work of art lies in hiding 'out there' – in the non-artistic and pre-artistic reality – waiting to be found and given artistic expression. Having been thus 'liberated' from the authority of 'reality' as the genuine or putative, but always supreme, judge of truth-value, the artistic image claims (and enjoys!), in the ongoing bustle of meaning-making, the same status as the rest of the human world. Instead of reflecting life, contemporary art adds to its contents. (Bauman, 1998, p.106)

This definition of contemporary art is a deeply ingrained part of Bauman's theory on the impossibility of the avant-garde, which is part of his discussion about Postmodernity. For Bauman, art belongs to the ordinary things of the world and is not an external entity. Art is no longer a polished sphere that

reflects – in the most diverse forms and with its distortions – that which is mirrored on its surface. The reality of art will function just like the non-artistic reality, it will be part of the living experience. To better clarify Bauman's statement that portrays contemporary art as a matter of 'presentation' and no longer related to 'representation' and with closer ties to life, it will be beneficial to retrieve Bauman analysis. In Bauman's theory in which he attests to the impossibility of the avant-garde, he firstly offers a didactic demonstration of the meaning of avant-garde using a simple etymological examination of the term: 'a spearhead or the first line of a moving army' (1998 p.95), a term particularly used in the military field. Based on this point, Bauman discusses the idea of space and time ordained by modernity, the same 'that will seek or preserve beauty, to keep clean and to observe a routine called order' (1998 p.1), Thus, following Bauman's thoughts on the modernist avant-garde challenged the straightness that reigned during Modernism, whereby modernist artists would be in the front line of the movement to be visible and attract followers, and in this manner the evolution (or revolution) would be inevitable.

The modernists [...] also firmly believed in the vector-like nature of time, convinced that the time-flow has a direction, that whatever comes later is (must be, ought to be) also better, while everything receding into the past is also worse – backward, retrograde, inferior. The modernists did not wage their war against the reality they found in the name of alternative values and a different world-vision, but in the name of acceleration: [...] they trusted the progressive nature of history and thus believed that the appearance of the new makes the extant, the bequeathed and the inherited redundant, turning them into relics and depriving them of the right to persist. (Bauman, 1998, p.96)

Differently from modernity, time in postmodern terms is described by Bauman as a non-linear pattern. It is not a refusal of the inexorable arrow of time but is the acceptance that the driving forces that are unfolding within this universe are dispersed. Thus, the demand for the front-runners to be followed is unnecessary, as the directions are scattered. The notion that something has to be ahead of others became impracticable after the Modern period. This is the reason why Bauman affirms that 'the phrase "postmodern avant-garde" is a contradiction in terms' (Bauman, 1998, p.100). Spatial-temporal fragmentation is acute and the horizon of the history of art has become more elastic than ever. Metaphorically speaking, with the end of Modernism the artistic avant-garde would

no longer be characterized by being a platoon that goes forward always maintaining the forefront position, but would be similar to guerrillas moving in a minefield, in this sense no avant-garde is possible. Moreover, there was a certain quest for the truth in art in the modernist avant-garde. Modernist artists tried to structure artistic language in a set of rules that they published in manifestos to guide their followers. Each new manifesto generated a newer truth in art. In contrast, with the end of Modernism the actual position is based on a maximized pluralism where the rules are never set a priori. Bauman explains this dynamic in contemporary art quoting Wittgenstein:

Ludwig Wittgenstein has demonstrated convincingly the impossibility of a 'private language'. It is the social acceptance of necessary connections between certain signs and certain meanings which makes a language. But contemporary art seems to be preoccupied more than anything else with challenging, defying and overturning everything which social acceptance, learning and training have solidified into schemas of 'necessary' connection; it is as if every artist, and every work of art, struggled to construe a new private language, hoping against hope to turn it into a genuine, consensual language, that is into a vehicle of communication (...). (Bauman, 1998, p.104)

Later, Bauman would complement this thought, observing:

In such a world, all meanings are suggestions, standing invitations to discussion and argument, to interpretation and reinterpretation; no meanings are made definitely, and none is definite once made. One may say that in this world of ours signs float in search of meanings, meanings drift in search of signs, (...). (Bauman, 1998, p. 106)

Having posed these issues, the field of contemporary art can be considered a quagmire, where the settings (unlike modernity) are provisional and almost never suggest a defined horizon. Bauman makes this clear when he conceptualizes contemporaneity as scattered signs that shift in an undefined space in search of meaning. This undermining of the meaning of artistic manifestation is a process that has been developing historically alongside civilization's interest in signs<sup>17</sup>. However, the main idea discussed here points to Duchamp as the artist who consolidated these proposals at the heart of the passage from modernity

17 For Walther-Bense, a general theory of signs, and therefore of meanings, has been a topic of philosophical interest since Ancient Greece. Since Aristotle (384-322 BC) concepts involving 'doctrine of signs' and 'theory of signs' have been known. (Walther-Bense, 2000, p.12)

to contemporaneity in the twentieth century. The theories developed by Michel Foucault shall be used in the following section to comprehend how these questions raised by Bauman are applied in the post-Duchampian art territory.

### **1.3 A NEW ARRANGEMENT OF THE WORLD**

Even with a great number of artists imparting new practices within the field of art, Duchamp was notable for having launched, in Foucauldian terms, not only new techniques or doings, but a new grid on the arrangement that language imprints on the world, a new way of sorting the things that establish what we know as reality. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault undertakes an archaeological work in which he analyses the shifts in what he called the 'grid', which can be explained as the intangible system which is instituted by a specific structural knowledge. It is an abstract concept that endeavours to evoke with a visual image the construction of a determined awareness.

Language plays a key role in this grid, being actually the grid itself. Therefore, the changes that we realize in the world are actually modifications inserted through the use of language that acts as a mediator filter between human perception and the natural world reality, as Foucault emphasizes:

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression. (Foucault, 2002, p. XXI)

This grid that gives the appearance of order to the world to us is not a given fact, but rather built by cultural layers that overlap and that at the same time are not strictly fixed. To a certain extent, Duchamp relocated, recycled or reutilized the proposals and theories of the artists that came before him, in the same way that he influenced the achievements of those who subsequently were exposed to his projects and ideas. What Duchamp did was to add new layers while at the same time moving others. He played, thus, with the grids that ordered the semantic meaning of words and concepts like 'art', 'creation', 'artist' and 'language', operating within the limits that these concepts offer as cultural data, in other words, the constructive elements of the culture. To change the order is, ultimately, to place together what is dispersed and distant, what is similar

to what is different, so that new identities can be built because eventually the history of the order of things will be the history of 'that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities'. (Foucault, 2002, p. XXVI).

This new order disturbs, in the first instance, that which is familiar and known to us, shaking the fragile surfaces that we assumed to be rigid and that form the basis for our experience and being in the world. The Duchampian experience shook the order established by categories that seemed steadfast, but in fact are constructions of language – and as such are always subject to change – and so it became possible to think about what was previously impossible.

Due to the very nature of Duchamp's trajectory it is a worthless task to try and hierarchize this artist's contributions. However, it was with *Nude Descending a Staircase n°2* (1912) that Duchamp's theories first became public and this was when according to the artist himself he experienced his great turn around. (Cabanne, 1971). With *Nude descending a Staircase n°2* Duchamp was not just questioning the very epistemological principles of art, he was also implementing a new order of things. When he presented the standard model from antiquity, the nude body, descending some steps, the undressed corporal fragments aimed to transform the sensorial experience into an intellectual one. After all, the fragmented image demands a cerebral effort on the part of the viewer to unify the human figure in the painting. In this way, he reconnected body and mind and reinvented the static and contemplative nude that has been a Classical model as old as the ancient Greek culture.

The question of the reconnection between body and mind deserves further clarification, as it will constantly reappear in this thesis. This reconnection happens in Duchamp when the artist invites the observer to actively complete the gaps in the artistic discourse proposed by him, as in the case of *Nude descending a Staircase n°2*. The exercise of giving meaning to the object of art in Duchamp is visceral, requiring a complete effort from all the senses, from all the mental and corporeal human capabilities. It involves a process of reasoning that mediated, i.e. the meaning is not a direct index of the object.

In other words, it involves active interpretation in a variety of forms, rather than a mere retinal process of direct indexical representation. This process connects what is otherwise doomed to remain as isolated elements of 'body' versus 'mind', with a separation of knowledge and action, a Cartesian worldview.



The relationship between body and mind is, thus, interpreted as a complementary relation, in opposition to the thought that these two concepts 'body' and 'mind' are binary opposites. It is a critique of Cartesian dualism and an approach connected to the theories developed by the philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914), who in 1878, coined the term 'pragmatism'.

The pragmatist philosopher gave special importance to the role of the body in the process of semiosis, awareness and knowledge acquirement. As Violi (2008) explains, perception for Peirce is not a direct understanding of external reality. It involves a process which combines 'abstract forms of reasoning' and 'basic physiological functioning of our bodies'. The author further explains its relationship:

In this way body, mind and the world are not only connected, but fundamentally interdependent of one another in an endless process of sensemaking which reminds us of the dynamics of self-organizing systems in an ongoing developmental relationship between organism and environment. The classical dualistic relationship between mind and matter is overcome, as well as that between the internal and the external world, which are no longer seen as being dramatically and irreducibly separate from one another. (2008, p.245)

In Duchamp's oeuvre, the index with the pre-determined meaning of the objects is shattered, requiring a body-mind assemblage. In the case of *Nude descending a Staircase n°2*, for example, the sensory experience that are bodily learned brings the vital link to its perception. Asked by Pierre Cabanne where the inception of the idea for this painting resided, in the sequence of interviews that Duchamp gave to the French critic in the last year of his life, Duchamp said:

In the nude itself. To do a nude different from the classic reclining or standing nude, and to put it in motion. There was something funny there, but it wasn't at all funny when I did it. Movement appeared like an argument to make me decide to do it. I wanted to create a static image of movement: movement is an abstraction, a deduction articulated within the painting, without our knowing if a real person is or isn't descending an equally real staircase. Fundamentally, movement is in the eye of the spectator, who incorporates it into the painting. (Cabanne, 1971, p.30)

In the successive action of going down a stairway Duchamp affirmed that what intrigued him was not only the retina, but also the imprisonment of the aesthetic experience in the eye. His intention was not only a cerebral artistic production, but also something that made the viewer awaken. Duchamp transported his work through the retinal boundaries into a field where thought and vision act one upon the other in a complex interplay of a mental approach and physical materials. Duchamp's perception was similar to another artist who shook the order of the things of his century, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), for whom painting was a mental activity.

Duchamp criticized what he entitled 'retinal art'; an art manifestation which favoured the visual stimulus rather than mental instigations. Having this preoccupation in mind, he once asked 'Can one make works which are not works of "art"?' (Sanouillet & Peterson, 1973, p.74). This question guided the curator Filipovic in a retrospective of Duchamp's oeuvre, in the catalogue's introductory text she placed: 'Duchamp [...] must have been wondered if indeed, as an artist, one could escape conventional definitions of the artwork, while still making things. After all, what exactly made an artwork "of art"?' (Filipovic, 2008, p.80)

Thus, before this deadlock situation in the arts, Duchamp's response proved to be aligned with a world where magic had already been replaced by science – an operation as already stated which was performed by the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century – and the products of art seemed to lose their status to the great scientific advances experienced from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. Not without reason, these two moments mark, for Foucault (2002), the two main discontinuities in the production of Western knowledge (the inauguration of the Classical age and the threshold into modernity, respectively). The Classical age was the result of a historical process marked initially by the transition from oral tradition to the forms of written culture. This passage can also be established in terms of the change from the prehistoric – oral – to the historic period, as it is based on the advent of writing. It is writing that creates the conditions for the emergence of historical consciousness. Prehistory is marked by a time of magic, with strong imagery, different from the linear time that sets the tone for writing and the Classical era, where we observe the cause and effect relationship between events. In the linear time of writing, 'sunrise is the cause of the cock's crowing; in the magical one, sunrise signifies crowing and crowing signifies sunrise' (Flusser, 2006, p.9). Prehistory's significance can be found in magic, and the meaning which arises from history, whose greatest

representative can be encountered in the Classical era, is a result of a linear chain of cause and effect, as contemplated in Newton's universe and the ideas of Enlightenment. In this linearity, everything has its place in the chain of causes and effects, and it is precisely this linear ordering that will be shaken by the complex structures that emerged from the collapse of Modern thinking, which ruptures with linearity and establishes a new era of discontinuities.

How could art regain its position of magic, of artefact capable of causing wonder, placing art back into the realm of life, given the rapid advances of science? The grid that assured meaning to the world had changed radically since Newtonian physics, affecting the manner in which art inserted itself as a central activity in this new configuration of the world. Order, in its current sense, no longer has the same meaning it had in Classical thought. The world is no longer represented in the same way.

Therefore, this is what Duchamp realized: That the way of being of things and the order that dispenses them, had been profoundly altered. Given this, nothing was left to the artist apart from practicing what to art would have been unthinkable until then: to take an industrialized object and institute it as an object of art, giving it a new semantic sense and a new space in the world of objects. He reordered it, reclassified it so that something banal from everyday life could also be included in the sphere of art (where it did not belong beforehand) and these actions also permitted that an object of art could return to the realm of everyday life. It is not about representing an object, as the object represents itself before a series of values are assigned to it. It is, rather, about presenting the object. The daily routine is always the hardest data to be captured and analysed; as it is an intermediate domain, confused and unclear. To debate about it and about the objects that constitute it is to realize that the grids that cast themselves upon the world are not the only possible ones, nor the best. Daily experience shows the brutal being of the world, a being that consists of an order inherent to itself. This brutal world of everyday life, between the art world and the world of science, has a silent order:

It is on the basis of this newly perceived order that the codes of language, perception, and practice are criticized and rendered partially invalid. It is on the basis of this order, taken as a firm foundation, that general theories as to the ordering of things, and the interpretation that such an ordering involves, will be constructed. (Foucault, 2002, p. XXII)

Duchamp goes beyond the theory of visual representation and arrives at the objectual presentation of intellectual concepts. He presents the concepts inscribed in the object. Foucault, once again, tells us that an analysis of the nineteenth century reveals that:

It is this configuration that, from the nineteenth century onward, changes entirely; the theory of representation disappears as the universal foundation of all possible orders; language as the spontaneous tabula, the primary grid of things, as an indispensable link between representation and things, is eclipsed in its turn; a profound historicity penetrates into the heart of things, isolates and defines them in their own coherence, imposes upon them the forms of order implied by the continuity of time (...) (Foucault, 2002, p.XXV)

Now, what things mean is no longer irrefutable. The meaning is no longer bonded to things but is otherwise modified by the act of passing time. Obviously, life in a world of such great change became strange. This unfamiliarity is confusing and seductive at the same time, because:

[...] we are all familiar with the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other; the mere act of enumeration that heaps them all together has a power of enchantment all its own. (Foucault, 2002, p. XVII).

Duchamp took advantage of the ties between seemingly unrelated things to create a relationship: a new grid, a harrowing space where what was common between syntax and semantics got lost. Where what is said or shown does not correspond with the expected.

This is an operation that takes place in the mind, not just in the gaze. As far the disruption in the order of the things is concerned, incited by a question on the rejection of a traditional notion of painting, Duchamp remarked:

I find that it's a very good solution for a period like ours, when one cannot continue to do oil painting, which, after four or five hundred years of existence, has no reason to go on eternally. Consequently, if you can find other methods for self-expression, you have to profit from them. It's what happens in all the arts. (...) Art is taking more the form of a sign, if you wish; it's no longer reduced to a decorative role. This is the feeling that has directed me all my life. (Cabanne, 1971, p.93)

This perception that impelled Duchamp forward in his life marked a Duchampian grid, this way of uniting disparate things that led to a:

thought without space, to words and categories that lack all life and place, but are rooted in a ceremonial space, overburdened with complex figures, with tangled paths, strange places, secret passages, and unexpected communications. (Foucault, 2002, p.XX)

For Foucault, in each new grid that is flung on the real, 'what is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible' (Foucault, 2002, p.XVIII). And what is this place? It is the virtual place of language, a place of possibilities that for Cartesian rational scientific thought is an unthinkable space, since a precise and stable definition of all the possible sets and grids to be constructed will never be attained. What Duchamp did, to a greater extent, was point to such fragilities and instabilities, indicating that both the industrial science world and the art world share a nuclear instability with each other, in an umbilical manner. Ades, Cox and Hopkins offer a precise reading of Duchamp's view of Cartesian thought:

If part of Duchamp's aim was indeed to discredit scientific thought on broad level, it is likely that he had in mind the French philosopher who would have figured prominently in his early education, namely, René Descartes (1596–1650). Duchamp often alluded ironically to Descartes in interviews, remarking that he was attracted to the philosopher's 'close mathematical thinking', but that, simultaneously, he sought to escape it; he was, he said, a 'defrocked Cartesian'. Asked by William Seitz which adjective he would use to describe his work, he replied: 'Metaphysical if any. And even that is a dubious term. Anything is dubious. It's pushing the idea of doubt in Descartes... to a much further point than they ever did in the school of Cartesianism: doubt in myself, doubt in everything... in the end it comes to doubt the verb 'to be'. This comment suggests that Duchamp's intellectually rigorous form of Dada owed as much to this arch-rationalist as to any other source, even if part of Duchamp's mission was to 'outdoubt' Descartes, whose famous method was, after all, primarily aimed at securing a sense of certainty. (Ades, Cox and Hopkins, 1999, p.61)

Although Classical science has been reluctant to accept this fact, instability processes, responsible for the erosion of existing or pre-established

meanings, have always been present within the human's relationship with the world. Stability was associated with certainty and faith in a panorama of a deterministic science, idealized to understand all phenomena in their completeness. In this panorama, it is said that 'In the classical view – and here we include quantum mechanics and relativity – laws of nature express certitudes. When appropriate initial conditions are given, we can predict with certainty the future, or "retrodict" the past'. (Prigogine, 1996, p.4). It means that stability – even in the subjective field – was assured.

Art has experienced such determinist procedures many times in the past, when representation was the unequivocal means to access a unique and true aesthetics. The meaning of the laws of nature gained a new sense and expressed possibilities rather than certainties with the incorporation of instability to the processes of understanding natural phenomena. It is noteworthy that this perception became consistent, broadly speaking, with science and art during the same period: the first half of the twentieth century. The dialogue with instability opened the way for the analysis of complex phenomena around us, which were no longer seen in a simplified and idealized manner. This allows humankind to turn toward the complexity of the systems that form the world and therefore culture. Duchamp demonstrated this change in art, opening a new path for unusual ways of perception and dialogue with the artwork, in line with the instability theory's centre of attention:

If the world were formed by stable dynamical system, it would be radically different from the one we observe around us. It would be a static, predictable world, but we would not be here to make the predictions. In our world, we discover fluctuations, bifurcations, and instabilities at all levels. Stable systems leading to certitudes correspond only to idealizations, or approximations. (Prigogine, 1997, p. 55)

In establishing these relationships, the artist, the manipulator of meaning, uncovers an inner secret that governs and forms the world, while at the same time impressing onto the world her/his own subjectivity. To debate, like Duchamp, about an approximation between art and science – intuition and rationalization –, is to accept the existence of a previous order of the world, expressed in daily actions, and unite, tensioning, the two poles, so that a new meaning emerges. Foucault furthermore alerts us that 'in fact, there is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation and of the application of a preliminary criterion.'

(Foucault, 2002, p. XXI). Therefore, it is fundamental to first understand what the criteria adopted by Duchamp were, for:

A 'system of elements' – a definition of the segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown, the types of variation by which those segments can be affected, and, lastly, the threshold above which there is a difference and below which there is a similitude – is indispensable for the establishment of even the simplest form of order. (Foucault, 2002, p. XXI)

The changes imprinted by Duchamp represented a significant change in the grid that art places on the world, changing the perception of modernity and anticipating the symptoms that the end of the Modern Era would bring in all its spheres. For this reason, Duchamp became a permanent reference for a great number of scholars in art history and the artist's name is constantly used as a landmark for tracing the path taken by contemporary artists. A whole set of ideas and theories were designed after Duchamp, in order to align the artworks that in some way were influenced by the changes that followed the ground-breaking experiments that the French artist brought to the field of art.

## **1.4 ART AFTER DUCHAMP**

Remarkable pieces of writing emerging not only from the field of art can be listed to illustrate this 'Duchamp effect'<sup>18</sup>. A well-known example is *Marcel Duchamp or the Castle of Purity* by Octavio Paz which is centred on the work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even – The Large Glass* and Duchamp's rejection of traditional painting as the origin of art as an idea. 'The divinity in whose honour Duchamp has raised this ambiguous monument is not the Bride or the Virgin or the Christian God but an invisible and possibly nonexistent being: the Idea.' (Paz, 2002, p.49). In the beginning of the book Paz draws a comparison between Picasso and Duchamp whom he considered the greatest influence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and claims that, 'the former by his works; the latter by a single work that is nothing less than the negation of work in the modern sense of the word.'<sup>19</sup> (Paz, 2002, p.7). As mentioned previously, this time however enunciated by Paz, Duchamp

18 In fact, *Duchamp Effect* is the name of the edition of *October* magazine (Fall 1994) dedicated to Duchamp with essays from scholars including Thierry de Duve, Sarat Maharaj, Hal Foster among others and with an introduction written by the American art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh.

19 In the original version in Spanish or in the Portuguese translation, this sentence carries a more poetic and expansive meaning as the word 'work' is 'obra' which means not only an 'artwork' – a single artistic manifestation – but can also be understood as something similar to the use in English of the French word 'oeuvre' which holds the sense of the whole artistic production of an artist.

is related to the interruption of a certain modernist tradition that in this case is understood as the surpassing of representation. Next, Paz continues giving relevance to a similar question pointed out by Foucault related to the conceptions found in the idea of the grid and representational disclosure:

Duchamp has shown us that the arts, including the visual, are born and come to an end in an area that is invisible. Against the lucidity of instinct he opposed the instinct for lucidity: the invisible is not obscure or mysterious, it is transparent... (2002, p. 9)

Returning to Foucault, he suggestively chose to analyse a work of art in the first chapter of his book *The Order of Things*. The artwork in question is Diego Velázquez's (1599–1669) *Las Meninas* (1656, figure 19), that for him was a meta-painting, related much more closely to the act of painting than a painting itself, that exposes the release from representation:

The mirror [reproduced in the painting] provides a metathesis of visibility that affects both the space represented in the picture and its nature as representation; it allows us to see, in the centre of the canvas, what in the painting is of necessity doubly invisible. (Foucault, 2002, p.9)

By using Velázquez's *Las Meninas* as an illustrative case, Foucault identified in this painting the synthesis of art's essential departure from the realm of imitation in order for representation to take place as pure presentation, being art a real and inexhaustible creative power, which actually creates reality from its intrinsic discourse:

Around the scene are arranged all the signs and successive forms of representation; but the double relation of the representation to its model and to its sovereign, to its author as well as to the person to whom it is being offered, this relation is necessarily interrupted. It can never be present without some residuum, even in a representation that offers itself as a spectacle. In the depth that traverses the picture, hollowing it into a fictitious recess and projecting it forward in front of itself, it is not possible for the pure felicity of the image ever to present in a full light both the master who is representing and the sovereign who is being represented. Perhaps there exists, in this painting by Velázquez, the representation as it were, of Classical representation, and the definition of the space it opens up to us. And, indeed, representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images,





Figure 19

Las Meninas

Velázquez, D. (1656)

Available at:

<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/las-meninas/9fdc7800-9ade-48b0-ab8b-edee94ea877f>

(Accessed 15 October 2016)

Oil on canvas,

318 x 276 cm

the eyes to which it is offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being. But there, in the midst of this dispersion which it is simultaneously grouping together and spreading out before us, indicated compellingly from every side, is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation – of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject – which is the same – has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form. (Foucault, 2002, p.17 and p.18)

Equivalent to Foucault, Paz also observed the relationship between Velázquez's painting and the rupture of a previous understanding of art that opens paths to a new perception of artistic creation. This new paradigm changed the artistic manifestation as also invited the viewer to accept a less passive function when facing an artistic experience. Paz refined his thoughts interconnecting them to Duchamp's achievements and seminal artworks:

The Oculist Witnesses are part of the *Large Glass*; the spectator of the *Étant donnés*, by his very act of peeking, shares in the dual rite of voyeurism and aesthetic contemplation. Without him the rite would not be fulfilled. It is not the first time that an artist includes in his painting those who look at it, and in my earlier study on Duchamp I recalled Velázquez and his *Meninas*. But what is representation in *Las Meninas* and in the *Large Glass* is an act in *Étant donnés*; we are really turned into voyeurs and also into ocular witnesses. Our testimony is part of the work. (Paz, 2008, p.7)

The art historian Thierry de Duve (1991 and 1996) also contributed to envisaging strategies to understand not only Duchamp's art but also post-Duchampian outcomes. He built an entire method of analysis to penetrate contemporary art using Duchamp's readymades. The book *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* as evident in its title carries a clear analogy to the philosophical view that predicates that reality is established by language. Duve's hypothesis – that transits through psychoanalysis – implies that Duchamp's questioning of the status of painting and the creation of his readymades provided the conditions that make art possible today. Accentuating the importance of the artist:

The first theoretical task of the historian of contemporary art must thus be to restore the major interpretants of this history to their historical continuity. From this came the precedence of the upstream over the downstream and my desire to demonstrate that the ready-made, far from being a gratuitous and accessory fantasy in the art of Duchamp, was his principal contribution to contemporary art, since above all else, it reinterpreted the past with such pertinence that it endowed it with a new resonance. (Duve, 1991, p. 188)

Besides *Pictorial Nominalism* the Belgian professor de Duve has published two other books in English entirely dedicated to Duchamp and his legacy. *Kant After Duchamp* (1998) also possesses a philosophical aspiration. It is based on Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and De Duve replaces what the philosopher understood as beauty with what is art after Duchamp. The book is highly regarded as one of the most expansive studies on Duchamp's impact and importance. Another book is *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, a compendium of many articles by other European and American critics. A revaluation and revision of art history has put forward Duchamp's legacy as the significant point of initiation of a new era in art practice. A succinct response highlighting the importance of Duchamp can be found in the words of the art critic and historian Benjamin Buchloh (1991), when accused by the seminal conceptual art figures Seth Siegelaub and Joseph Kosuth of having a 'Duchamp fixation'. Not by chance, as it has been mentioned before with regards to science, Buchloh illustrates his opinion comparing Duchamp with a famous scientist.

I guess I would have to admit that I suffer from a Duchamp fixation (as a physicist might suffer from an Einstein fixation) to the extent that I do in fact consider Duchamp's contribution to the theory and practice of aesthetic experience tremendous – a legacy whose full range is only beginning now to become apparent. But my attempt to unravel that complicated legacy does not posit Duchamp as the personal beginning and end. Quite the opposite, it is an attempt to develop a detailed reading of the works of the artists and their operations inside the parameters of the Duchampian legacy and to understand the real changes that they have contributed within that discursive and institutional territory called contemporary art. (Buchloh, 1991, p.161)

Controversially, it was Kosuth who wrote a sort of vanguard ode to Duchamp in *Art after Philosophy*, a text in which Kosuth tried to institute theoretical foundations for Conceptual Art, which is how the type of artistic expression

whose main premise was the dematerialization of the artistic object was labelled, bringing to the forefront of the art scene a flow of actions, processes and the use of verbal language as basic elements of artistic operations (Lippard, 2001). In this text first published in the USA in 1969, one year after Duchamp's death, Kosuth defined what he called 'formalist art', an art, which according to his beliefs would be art only in morphological terms. He described the official classification of art in terms of a limited type of art which privileged a certain 'artistic condition', which was then ascribed certain categories, painting and sculpture being two of the most dominant. This is how he set out his evaluation of formalist art, understanding it as a decrepit form of art, the existence and understanding of which depended on the perspective of a long historical tradition. According to Kosuth, this form would be a 'mere aesthetic exercise' with a minimum of creative effort, getting closer to a 'decoration vanguard' than to art itself:

this idea [the split between visual contemplation and art] never drastically conflicted with artistic considerations before recent times, not only because the morphological characteristics of art perpetuated the continuity of this error, but as well, because the apparent other 'functions' of art (depiction of religious themes, portraiture of aristocrats, detailing of architecture, etc.) used art to cover up art. (Kosuth, 2003, p.854)

The author granted to Duchamp the credit for giving art an autonomous truth. To Kosuth, Duchamp's invention of the readymade constitutes the starting point at which artistic production began to be concerned about meanings, more focused on what was being conveyed than on its materialization. According to Kosuth, the shift in the nature of art from a morphology (appearance) to a functional question (conception) brings a new form of language: 'All arts (after Duchamp) are conceptual (in their nature) since arts only exist conceptually' (Kosuth, 2003, p.855). Despite the extremism of Kosuth's approach, we might see his words as an example of the scope of Duchamp's influence.

Among the first people who wrote about Duchamp was the French Surrealist leader Andre Breton, author of many critical texts about the friend and many times associate partner in artistic projects. According to Cabanne (1971), Breton considered Duchamp the most intelligent man of the twentieth century. The devotion of the poet towards the artist resulted in different essays in 1922, 1934, 1940 and 1945. Also, as specified by the art historian Gavin Parkinson, Breton acknowledged Duchamp as the inspirer of Surrealism and 'capable of freeing modern consciousness from that terrible mania for fixation that we have always

denounced' (Breton cited in Parkinson, 2008, p. 37). The first words dedicated to Duchamp's endeavours were published in the magazine *Littérature* in October 1922, distinguishing the artist from the others of his generation. Concerning the *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even – The Large Glass* which at that time Duchamp had been working on for eight years, Breton wrote 'unknown masterpiece and around which, even before its completion, the most fabulous legends are being woven.' (Breton cited in Parkinson, 2008, p 36).

This issue of *Littérature*, containing this prescient statement by Breton, was released just one decade after Duchamp withdrew *Nude Descending a Staircase* n°2 (1912) from the *Salon des Indépendants*, Paris, in 1912. The *Nude* was responsible for a minor disagreement among the Duchamp brothers; that became an argument and made Duchamp give up painting to 'get a job' (Cabanne, 1971, p. 17).

Among the seven children of Blainville's notary officer Eugene Duchamp and his wife Lucie four became artists, the elders Jacques Villon, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, Marcel and Suzanne<sup>20</sup>, his closest sister. With a difference of 12 and 13 years respectively between them and Duchamp, Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Jacques Villon were the first to go to Paris and embark upon a career in the arts. They were responsible for the formation of the Puteaux Group, a reunion of artists that were investigating new styles of painting, mainly influenced by early Cubism. The Puteaux group is named after the district with the same name in the Parisian suburb where Duchamp's older brothers went to live and where around them a circle of artists who were influenced by Cubist tendencies started to meet informally and discuss art and science, between 1911 and 1913. They criticized what they understood as analytical cubism, which was still impregnated with the influence of the eye. The Puteaux group wanted to

20 The elder Jacques Villon (1875–1963), whose real name was Gaston Duchamp and Raymond Duchamp-Villon (1876–1918) who was the brother, according to the biographer Tomkins (2005), that Duchamp had an admiration for that bordered on idolatry. Suzanne Duchamp (1889–1963) who was married to the painter Jean Crotti, was deeply influenced by her nearest brother in age and affection, Marcel. She had a short involvement with the Dada movement and Marcel more than once sent her instructions to assemble readymades. In the catalogue of the Société Anonyme's 1926 International Exhibition of Modern Art (more information about this show will be given in Chapter 2) there is the following note regarding Duchamp brothers: 'They tell a very charming story about Gaston Duchamp. His father, a lawyer of great distinction, was distressed when his oldest son showed such curious tendencies in his art. This son, not wishing to grieve his father by making his name appear ridiculous, took the name of Jacques Villon for his artistic work. Then the second son, Raymond Duchamp, showed similar tendencies not only as a sculptor, but as an architect, but as he was his brother's junior by several years, the father heaved a sigh and permitted him to use the hyphenated name of Duchamp-Villon, since by this time the name of Villon was treated with respect throughout the world of art. When his youngest son, Duchamp, showed even greater tendencies toward this new peculiar mental bent in the artistic world, his father capitulated entirely, feeling that he was facing a force stronger than any personal prejudice. The three brothers were three of the primary movers of the cubistic movement in Paris when it was born.' (Dreier, 1926, p.16)

work with an art that was fundamentally intellectual and for this reason they were interested in learning about scientific discoveries. Among the themes that they were curious about, they had a particular involvement in readings about math and the fourth dimension.

Because of his brothers who welcomed Duchamp in Paris, he also became involved with the group and with their support he would later take part at the *Salon des Indépendants*. However, the two elder brothers, asked by the other artists who felt uncomfortable with the presence of Duchamps' provocative nude, suggested to the young Marcel to at least change the name of the painting. Feeling outraged Duchamp brought his painting back home under his arms. This was a break-through for the artist who freed himself from any convention or relation to movements and art in general: 'So, that cooled me off so much that, as a reaction against such behaviour coming from artists whom I had believed to be free, I got a job. I became a librarian'. (Cabanne, 1971, p.30). This perception of freedom may be the genesis of the artistic thinking that will appear in other instances of his life and lifework.

### **1.5 IN THE REALM OF POST-DUCHAMPIAN ART**

This thesis uses the term post-Duchampian as a historical landmark and as a theoretical concept that defines the art made in response to Duchamp's provocations. The notion of art as an open entity replete with meanings that can be filled by the viewer or spectator is diffused in the type of artistic practice, characterized here, as post-Duchampian art.

The post-Duchampian artwork does not have a definitive form or meaning. It needs to be in contact with the public to be completed. It carries in itself traces of the context from which it came. Post-Duchampian art is also laden with interpretations and charged by the context to which it is exposed. The post-Duchampian artwork can modify how it is projected onto the world. That is, when it is detached from its primary background and transferred into another setting. In post-Duchampian art the artistic project – whether composed of ideas, time-based components or tangible materials – is the manifest force which triggers the artistic experience.

It is pertinent to note that the acknowledgement of Duchamp's practice as an indicator of a turning point in art making and thinking is not something unusual for artists, neither is it out of the ordinary for theoreticians or art historians. As already mentioned, conceptual artists, for example, have appraised

Duchamp in artistic/theoretical texts. Other artists from a generation subsequent to Duchamp, that were connected to Pop art, such as U.S. artists Jasper Johns (b.1930) and Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), just to cite two names, openly declared Duchamp's influence on their careers (Basualdo & Battle, 2012). Johns once said: 'The art community feels Duchamp's presence and his absence. He has changed the condition of being here.' (Johns, 1971, p.110). In the field of art theory, for instance, Hal Foster when talking about art from the 1960s, such as Minimalism and Pop art, or when he mentions certain practices such as the use of 'appropriation' by artists in the 1980s, refers to a possible 'Duchampian genealogy', meaning there exists a series of artists who use 'Duchampian strategies' such as the readymade to make their own art (Foster, 1989, p.258). He argues 'that not only did Duchamp foreground the instability of the sign [...], but he also re-grounded the sign in indexical marks. (Foster, 1989, p.258).

The intention behind the term post-Duchampian is to distinguish the art that resulted from the transition from Modern to contemporary art. Duchamp had an emblematic significance in this transition as explained earlier in this chapter. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the erosion of the meaning of Modernism leading to the emergence of contemporary art, was not caused by the attitude of a single man. Duchamp was not an isolated case among the artists and thinkers who were searching for new artistic languages.

Duchamp was not a reclusive person and always got along with colleagues, friends, partners, family, whether these people were artists, collectors, curators, or not related to art at all (Kuenzli & Naumann, 1996). It can be seen throughout this thesis, particularly when discussing his co-curatorial practice, that Duchamp worked well collaboratively. The loss of conventional and representational art to prepare the terrain for an art which is a 'presentation', 'that exploits the gap between signifier and signified' (Foster, 1989, p.261) was not something that can be attributed to Duchamp alone. This aspect, as seen in Bauman's explanation previously discussed in this chapter, is also linked to a moment in which ideals of beauty and purity were in dispute and a more plural and diversified vision of the world were welcomed.

Thus, when opting for the term 'post-Duchampian' to define which type of artistic practice this thesis is concerned with, this research is not relying on the work of one French-born man, but actually on what it represents in a greater spectrum as scrutinized below.

Based on relevant bibliography, this chapter explained that Duchamp's name is often referred to when discussing the moment in art history when art practice was subjected to a dramatic change. One of the reasons that Duchamp is frequently remembered when talking about this matter, is his open attitude against art historical canons.

A canon, as explained by Gregor Langfeld, circumscribes aspects of culture established 'as crucial, of utmost importance or exemplary' (2018, p.1). Canons are guides to be followed and they institutionalised a hierarchy among artists. For this reason, the author adverts: 'it is important to remain conscious of the canonisation processes that led and still lead to some artists being included in the canon and entering history and others being excluded' (Langfeld, 2018, p.1).

To Griselda Pollock who is a critic of art historical narratives based on the notion of self-evident canons, they legitimate cultural and political identities. She pointed out that until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, art historical canons, in other words, artworks established as 'the best, the most representative, and the most significant' (1999, p.3) were mainly produced by European men. She also observed that this panorama has changed since the 1970s when a revisionist approach in art history took place. However, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Duchamp started his trajectory as artist and curator, being a critic of art historical canons ultimately meant being against a vision of art as something that belongs to a male European society. As Pollock addressed, women and non-European artists were both left out of the canons records and ignored as part of the cultural heritage. Thus, if Duchamp put himself in a place of contesting what was given as having an indisputable value because it was institutionalized by 'elites or supports of hegemonic social groups, classes and "races"' (Pollock, 1999, p.4), he was also against the white male dominance in art history, as his record of work in real collaboration with women as well makes clear. Many examples can be cited<sup>21</sup>, of which the foremost one for this thesis is his partnership with Katherine Dreier.

For this reason, by sustaining a term that brings to mind the name of one important anti-canon artist, who searched for inclusivity and intellectual freedom, this research is clearly avoiding seeing art history under one perspec-

21 An earlier example already discussed was the teamwork with Beatrice Wood with whom the R. Mutt case became remarkable; Duchamp also provided unconditional support to his sister Suzanne's artistic career development; later in this thesis we will see Duchamp's cooperation with women patrons like Peggy Guggenheim and Louise Arensberg, these are examples among others that are not the focus of this study.



tive, in which there is a cultural hierarchy, where the European male tradition is the owner of the greatest narratives or understood as superior to other cultures. On this account, this first chapter dedicates a whole section to debating the limitations of art historical labels to justify the use of the term 'post-Duchampian'. The section named 'a new arrangement of the word' explains why this term was created to build the research's hypothesis.

The fabrication of a term based on someone who fought against the European cannons, was an effort to deconstruct aspects of art history – that in many ways are umbilically connected to the European version of the facts – to give room to a global perspective with a plurality of voices. This equated to the possibility of subversion, as well as the attempt to defeat a non-balanced system, at least in the scope of this thesis. Deciding on a new term is also a crusade to escape from using terms that imply ideologies of power. Opting for working with variations of vocabularies is in fact a posture that combats any trace of Eurocentrism in art history. Gerardo Mosquera gives a comprehensible summary of what Eurocentrism is in art history and how it has changed:

In anthropology we find an acknowledgement of ethnocentrism in the 18th century, and a consolidation of the idea of cultural relativism by Boas before the end of the 19th century. But, until recently this idea had not significantly infiltrated the studies and interpretations of art and literature, centred as they were in criteria of values linked to the myth of the 'universal'. The discourses called postmodern, with their interest in alterity, have gradually introduced a more relativist attitude to the scene. (1992, p. 36)

As has already been described in this chapter and how it will be presented in subsequent pages, Duchamp's positioning in life as curator and artist was in favour of inclusion, democracy and cultural exchanges regardless of gender, ethnic or cultural origins. The following chapters will show that ever since Duchamp left Europe in 1915, when he first went to New York, and 40 years later, in 1955, when he literally abnegated his European heritage becoming an American citizen, he was someone who aimed to leave Eurocentrism tendencies behind.

The next chapter will also discuss the curatorial projects that he accomplished together with Katherine Dreier. These projects were in their majority open to transnational approaches, without giving credit to nationalism and

rejecting hierarchy among artists. It will also show that in comparison with other famous curators of his time, Duchamp and Katherine Dreier's exhibitions did not draw a lineage in art history that maintained Europe in the centre of artistic manifestations. It is also worth noting that his curator partner Katherine Dreier was an independent woman who openly advocated for women rights (Apter, 1998) and Duchamp always gave her his support, even after her death when he carefully looked after her bequest. Also, Duchamp being someone who adopted a female alter-ego, it would be questionable to believe that he did not oppose male dominance in art history.

Hence, throughout this thesis, the term post-Duchampian art is used as an emblematic notion, that distinguishes the type of art we are investigating and that can also expose the inconsonant definitions of art history. It does not reinforce any bias, but rather tries to look at art history through a different perspective<sup>22</sup>. The transition, in the art realm that Duchamp cooperated with configured a chain of events set in motion, not only by him, but in conjunction with other people and especially influenced by the social and historical contexts that permeated Duchamp's errant life. At this point in this thesis, one can already realise that 'context' is a key word for this academic writing. Among Duchamp's virtues were his awareness of the time and his willingness to discover 'new airs' (Kuenzli & Naumann, 1996). Thus, his actions were considered within the contexts in which Duchamp lived as an artist, played as a player and worked as a curator.

In considering the term post-Duchampian art, it was important to take a few steps, one of them backwards, in order to then move forwards. The first was to provide evidence of Duchamp's importance and explain his strategy regarding the readymade as the first resort to understanding the dynamics of post-Duchampian art. To stipulate such terminology, this thesis walked into

22 Mosquera wrote that 'The struggle against Eurocentrism should not burden art with a myth of authenticity' (1992, p.37) when discussing what he as a Cuban curator and art historian understood as the 'Marco Polo syndrome'. This syndrome is when an artist outside the European or North American regions, needs to produce an 'authentic' art with no traces of hybridism with the so-called Western culture, meaning European and North American cultures. The claim of purity is a two-edged sword, Mosquera argued. If the artist does not present this fictional 'purity', she or he can be taken as 'colonised' and not in sync with her/his own history or 'roots'. The same could happen with someone, like myself, who is a female Latin American researcher and has worked for a long time on the dialogue between cultures, when I decided to research an artist that does not share the same gender or origin as mine. Thus, to distance myself from this 'syndrome', and not to be taken as colonised, I explained why the use of post-Duchampian notion is not Eurocentric or sexist. Only to the eyes of a reader who has an agenda-driven interpretation of sources, would this term, just because it carries the name of an artist who happened to be born a man on European soil, be understood as Eurocentric and sexist. I am not able to change the bias and limitations in the minds of others. Thus, for the sake of a variation in vocabulary, precision and quality of research this is a risk that I choose to take.

the minefield consisting of the inconsonant definitions found in art history. This move was a crucial step, a metalinguistic one, in which the thesis used art historical premises to explain the unstable and deviant nature of art history itself. The lack of consensus in art history in answers to questions such as 'What is Modern?' or the lack of unanimity when describing the constituent elements of contemporary art were discussed to introduce the notion of post-Duchampian art.

Post-Duchampian art is, therefore, related to the replacement of Modern art, as an art in search of certainty, with contemporary art, understood as the deconstruction of stable structures and in which artists are players who manipulate the meaning of a given sign. Thus, the term post-Duchampian art could be considered as a ramification of the many definitions of contemporary art as seen in Foster (2010). It can also be identified with the type of art that emerges from the impossibility of avant-garde (Bauman, 1998).

In this manner, following the new arrangement of the world inaugurated by Duchamp, post-Duchampian art can be also that which makes regular use of abstract concepts as the key instruments for creative production, the type of practice that confronts that which is regarded as 'retinal art' which operates by means of a sensorial aesthetic. Duchamp pointed out a few issues: the act of looking, the body, movement and time. These topics might be contained in and exposed by post-Duchampian art in order to provoke an awakening of the public, the perception of the surrounding space and its context. Saying that, political and social conjectures are rooted in post-Duchampian art waiting to be activated by a curator or exhibition-maker.

Hence, the importance Duchamp attached to space and context is central to understanding post-Duchampian art, which must be comprehended as a conceptual aesthetic play. At this point of this thesis, as the entangled conditions which made Duchamp's wide-reaching changes possible are now clear and placed in order, this research will review not only Duchamp's artworks but what he considered to be an artwork. From this effort, a new view shall be cast into curatorial making, and onto Duchamp's grid that organizes spaces and ideas for the composition of a discourse from other discourses.

# Chapter 2:

# Duchamp's

# curatorial practice

Alongside Duchamp's intermittent artistic production, his endless chess games and his conviction that he was just a 'breather' – as he once answered Calvin Tomkins (2013) who asked the 'retired artist' how he was spending his time: 'I'm a breather. I am a respiration isn't that enough? Why do people think they have to work?' (Tomkins, 2013, p.3). Duchamp replied to Tomkins' enquiry with these poignant questions. He continued stating the importance of really breathing. 'to live life at a different tempo and on a different scale from the way most of us live.' (Tomkins, 2013, p.3) At the time Tomkins did not know that Duchamp was working on *Étant Donnés*. Duchamp gave the same sort of answer to Cabanne, when the French critic asked him if he had had the desire to be 'artistically cultured' when he was young:

I would have wanted to work, but deep down I'm enormously lazy. I like living, breathing better than working. Therefore, if you wish, my art would be that of living: each second, each breath is a work which is inscribed nowhere, which is neither visual nor cerebral. It's a sort of constant euphoria. (Cabanne, 1971, p.72)

Since Duchamp never refuted the rumour that he had stopped making art – there was a constant occupation that is normally omitted in the studies about Duchamp: his huge interest in putting exhibitions together.

This chapter will shed light on this neglected aspect of Duchamp's trajectory and it will be developed in a historically progressive manner. We will begin by presenting the earliest days of Duchamp's interest in exhibition-making connected to biographical facts of his life, such as his move from Paris to New York. We shall consider how exhibitions' design back in that period was composed, analysing the watershed 1913 exhibition named the Armory Show in the

USA, in which works by Duchamp generated a pronounced impact. We will then intently examine Duchamp's contribution as a curator to The Société Anonyme, Inc.: Museum of Modern Art 1920, the association where he was explicitly in charge of proposing and organising exhibitions. Next, we will focus our attention on the inception of the Société Anonyme's 1926 International Exhibition of Modern Art in the Brooklyn Museum and we will take a close look at its curatorial project. Emphasis will be given to Duchamp's artwork *Large Glass*, which was displayed for the first time. The concept of this piece overflows into the manner in which Duchamp understood the exhibition display. Then, to contextualize the changes in exhibition-making envisaged by Duchamp, we will review the work of another important curator in the period, Alfred H. Barr Jr. (1902-1981), to draw a comparison between the two approaches. To conclude, we will see how Duchamp's approach to curatorship was applied in two Surrealist exhibitions: 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, in Paris and the First Papers of Surrealism, 1942, in New York.

## **2.1 THE EARLY DAYS OF DUCHAMP'S CURATORIAL PRACTICE**

It could be argued that organising exhibitions was an activity that always had a special importance for Duchamp. It would be difficult to specify a date when this occupation caught his attention, but we must say that it appears to be from the outset. One of the first exhibitions that he participated in was the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne in Rouen in 1909. The 22-year-old Duchamp was responsible for the design of this show's folder and poster. His contribution was very simple, but the young Duchamp's engagement with these behind-the-scenes actions could be interpreted as an anticipation of his preoccupation with how to engage the public's attention in relation to art.

Talking about the work and life of Duchamp Petruschansky provides more information about this early beginning and suggests that the young Duchamp was looking for a calmer place to live in order to assimilate the art of his time, a process that led to his first public exhibitions and to his collaboration with the art scene in Rouen:

In late 1908, he looks to leave the city's bustle and bohemia and he settles in Neuilly, on the outskirts of Paris, where he begins to assimilate modern innovations, an investigative process that would lead him "in to all manner of unsuccessful attempts, characterized by indecision," as he would later declare. He participates in the Salon d'Automne that

year, in which the jury would reject paintings by Georges Braque. He then enjoys his first public exhibitions: in 1909 he sells works at the Salon des Indépendants and at the Salon d'Automne, and he shows at the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne in Rouen, also designing the posters for the show. During 1910, he attends as many shows as possible. (Petruschansky, 2008,p.3)

Later on, Duchamp quietly cooperated with his brothers when they organised the very successful Salon de la Section d'Or (figure 20), in the Galerie La Boétie in Paris in 1912. Set up by the Puteaux group, this show reunited 49 artists and around 200 works (Galerie la Boétie, 1912). Considered the largest and most influential cubist exhibition before World War I, it was also one of the most visited in the period (Tomkins, 2005). Jacques Villon suggested the name Section d'Or that means Golden Section. It was a clear reference to the mathematical principles (as mentioned earlier on p.88 and 89) that instigated the Duchamp brothers, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger and co. Besides, the title reflected the

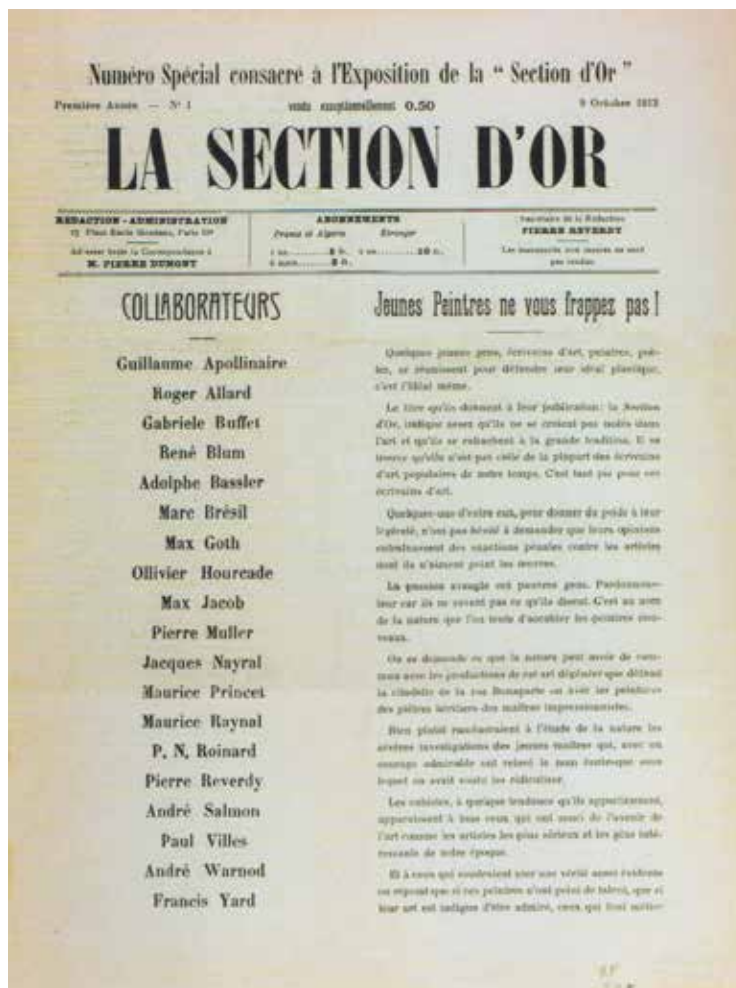


Figure 20  
Cover of La Section d'Or, no.1, 9 October 1912

impact of the 1910 French translation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2000) on the group, but it can also suggest a pun, a play on words, a sort of joke dear to the Duchamp family as 'section' can be understood as a cut, a separation from the past.

It was on this occasion, that he finally displayed the *Nude Descending a Staircase n°2*, in the French capital. The American artist, writer and exhibition-maker Walter Pach (1883-1958) was in Paris and went to see the Section d'Or and took the opportunity to visit the Puteaux members' studio. According to Tomkins (2005), from this preliminary encounter, he shipped to the USA, the *Nude* and three other paintings by Duchamp, *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* (1912, figure 21), *The Chess Players* (1911, figure 22) and *Sad Young Man on a Train* (1911, figure 23). Pach selected the latter and the *Nude Descending a Staircase n°2* for the ambitious show he was organising with other members of the Association of the American Painters and Sculptors (AAPS, formed in 1912) to open in February 1913 in New York: the International Exhibition of Modern Art, as known as, The Armory Show (figure 24).

The 1913 Armory Show is considered a watershed in the history of exhibitions and also a landmark in the history of art. It is not just by coincidence that the greatest sensation in the exhibition was the initially rejected and then polemic *Nude Descending a Staircase*. To illustrate its significance it is enough to say that the Armory Show was re-created in 1963 to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Even more recently, in 2013, there was the exhibition *The Armory Show at 100* at the New-York Historical Society, which 'aimed to consider the exhibition's impact beyond the scope of American art' and 'with 100 masterworks that were originally featured in the 1913 Armory Show' (Gratta, 2013). Among them there was *The Nude Descending a Staircase*, which also featured in the first re-staging. Duchamp, who had not seen the original exhibition, visited the Armory Show's Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition as the 'guest of honour' and gave a lecture to a 'standing-room' audience (Duncan, 2013, p.45). Posteriorly, in an interview for a radio programme he said:

It's a curious thing that, at least as a picture, it really beat me, in that I disappeared for forty years because people talked about the painting, but they never named me. I was completely obscured, or completely discarded—by my own painting—as an entity! It's only in the last ten years or so that I have reappeared again on the surface, and I'm more important than the painting. (Duchamp 1963 cited in Duncan, 2013, p.49).



Figure 21

*The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*

Duchamp, M. (1912)

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51461.html?mulR=1733859208|2>  
(Accessed 15 October 2016)

Oil on canvas

114.6 x 128.9 cm





Figure 22

*Portrait of Chess Players*

Duchamp, M. (1911)

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51446.html?mulR=2090277738|3>

(Accessed 15 October 2016)

Oil on canvas

100.6 x 100.5 cm

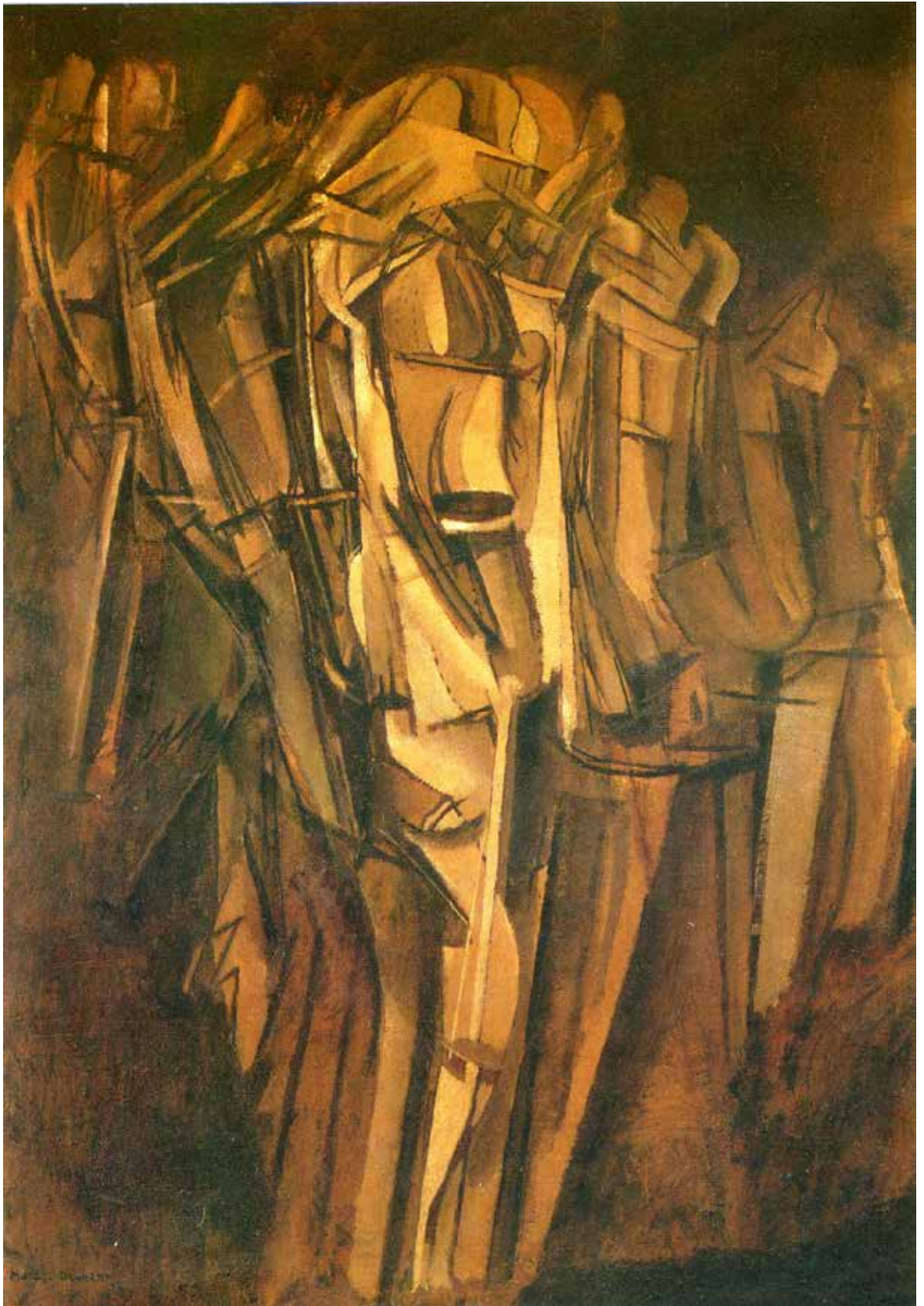


Figure 23  
Sad Young Man on a Train  
Duchamp, M. (1911)  
Available at: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/marcel-duchamp/sad-young-man-in-a-train-1911>  
(Accessed 16 October 2016)  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 73 cm





Figure 24  
View from the entrance to the Armory on Lexington Avenue.

Regarding the historical impact of the show, McCarthy (2013) points out that since 1988 the number of scholarly writings analysing the show has been increasing. Before that, art historians had already written remarks about the outcomes of the Armory show. For example, Meyer Schapiro included the 1952 essay *The Introduction of Modern Art in America: The Armory Show* in his book *Modern Art: 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. He wrote:

Four years afterwards the Show was remembered as a historic event, a momentous example of artistic insurgence. (...) In time the new European art disclosed at the Armory Show became the model of art in the United States. (Schapiro, 1978, p. 136)

Schapiro understood it as the beginning of internationalism in Art, at least for Americans. Harold Rosenberg, another American theorist, in his 1963 article *The Armory Show: Revolution Reenacted* published in the *New Yorker* magazine, at the occasion of the re-staging of the show, coined that the 'immediate and telling effect of the Armory Show was on the American art public' and on the his-

tory of American art education' (Rosenberg, 1973, p. 191). He offers an indicative view suggesting that Modern Art was presented as a cause' to be embraced in the years following the Armory Show and the consequence was the establishment of a 'Vanguard Audience' that would later without reserves be able to 'accept the new in its entirety' (Rosenberg, 1973, p. 191). However, he criticizes what would be a posterior effect of these changes:

Today [1963], the vanguard audience is open to anything. Its eager representatives – curators, museum directors, art educators, dealers – rush to organize exhibitions and provide explanatory labels before the paint has dried on the canvas or the plastic has hardened. (...) Art historians stand ready with cameras and notebooks to make sure that every novel detail is safe for the record. The tradition of the new has reduced all other traditions to triviality.' (Rosenberg, 1973, p. 192).

His point was refuted by the European Ernst Gombrich in a revised edition of the best seller *The Story of Art* (2006). The book had its first edition in 1950 and the last edition revised by the art historian was published in 1994. Also speaking about the Armory Show as a key avant-garde show, he criticized Rosenberg's text saying that the U.S critic may perhaps be right but art historians have the duty to be aware of this possible involuntary result of their activities.

Indeed I think any author who now writes a history of art, and particularly of contemporary art, has the duty to draw attention to this unintended effect of his activities. In my introduction, I touched on the harm which a book of this kind might do. I mentioned the temptation of indulging in clever talk about art. But this danger is trivial compared to the misleading impression which such a panorama may give that all the matters in art is change and novelty. It is the interest in change that has accelerated change to its giddy pace. Of course it would not be fair lay all the undesirable consequences — as well as the desirable ones — at the door of art history. In certain sense the new interest in the history of art is in itself a consequence of a great many factors which have changed the position of art and artists in our society and made art more fashionable than it had ever been in the past. (Gombrich, 2006, p.476)

According to what we have just read, it was not by chance that Duchamp was the 'agent provocateur' of this event that is considered a remark-

able exhibition. The Armory Show was a turning point in the manner that the public perceived art. For this reason, it is important to provide a review here about the novelties presented in the massive space of the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment Armory where the exhibition took place before travelling to the Art Institute of Chicago and the Copley Society in Boston.

With a great appeal to public interest, it attracted circa 87,000 visitors during its four-week run in New York and a total of 300,000 in the three cities, New York, Chicago and Boston (Gratta, 2013). The Armory show reunited around 1,300 works<sup>23</sup> – paintings, prints and sculptures – of which a third came from Europe, covering the main movements, and among hundreds of artists it included names such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.

As Schapiro (1978) puts it, although represented in the exhibition, Cubism's 'inventors' and 'originators', Picasso and the French Georges Braque (1882–1963) were overshadowed by the Cubist paintings by Picabia and Duchamp. For the general public what remained as illustrations of what was meant to be Cubism were the images created by the last two. In turn, the protagonist of Fauvism, the French Henri Matisse (1869 – 1954) who had 17 works in the show, also made the headlines, but not in a favourable way. The reception of his *Nudes* was worse than Duchamp's *Nude*. If Duchamp's painting perplexed the public, Matisse's representations of female nudes in bright colours were considered distorted by critics, a step backwards for Art and even provoked attacks from angry detractors: fuming students of the Art Institute of Chicago burned an effigy of Matisse's painting in a mock judgment that sentenced the Fauvist as an artistic murderer. (O'Brian, 1999)

In 1950, Meyer Schapiro described the lack of organization:

How could one enclose in a single formula the clear, bright works of Matisse and the intricate *Nude* of Duchamp? The creators have no ultimate common goal, but advanced from canvas to canvas, following up new ideas that arose in the course of their work, hardly imagining what would emerge in the end; they seemed to be carried along by a hidden logic that unfolded gradually, yielding forms surprising to themselves. Those artist and critics who tried in writing to anticipate the future of

23 Schapiro (1978) explained that the Armory Show's catalogue lists 1,100 works but it is incomplete, as one of the organisers Pach estimated that altogether there were about 1,600 works. In the recent publication *The Armory Show at 100 Archives of American Art Journal* (Duncan, 2013) and in Tomkins (2005) the number stated is 1,300.

this art turned out to be wrong. They were contradicted in few years by unexpected diversities and reactions. (Schapiro, 1978, p.139)

Besides pointing out the incoherence of the show, retrospectively he tried to be fair in exposing the contemporaneous blindness as the form and recognition of modernism:

We begin only now [1950] to see the process as a whole; and it appears to us very complex, a fluctuating movement that at times negates itself. But the vaguer interpretations were perhaps not altogether bad. The more precise definitions narrowed the field and led to sectarianism and indifference at a moment when what was most in question was the artist's freedom in exploring a new realm of possibility in his art. It must be said that the Armory Show helped to maintain the loose thinking and confusion about modern art. Cubists, Expressionists, Fauves, Orphists, Neo-Impressionists, Symbolists, Classicists, and Primitivizing Realists were exhibited side by side, and the greatest artists were presented on the same plane as the imitators and the lesser men. (Schapiro, 1978, p.140)

They were organised in octagonal rooms in a sequence from A to R (figure 25). According to Laurette E. McCarthy (2013), the galleries that created



Figure 25  
Floor plan, The Armory Show (as printed in the catalogue), Armory of the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Infantry

the biggest buzz in the press, even being called the 'Chamber of Horrors' by the *New York Tribune*, were the 'H', where most of Matisse's paintings were and 'I', the 'Cubist room' where Duchamp's pieces were allocated. For Duchamp's biography, Tomkins searched for authoritative reports that testified that people had queued for 30 or 40 minutes before standing in front of the painting for just a few moments then, without believing what they were seeing, expressing anger or laughing at it before moving on to the next artwork (Tomkins, 2005). Michael R. Taylor in his article *Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase [No.2] and the 1913 Armory Show Scandal Revisited* offers a summary of the impact that the painting had on the media and outside the art enthusiast's circle:

Unfamiliar with Cubist fragmentations, many visitors struggled to locate the nude figure within the jumble of interlocking planes and jagged lines, thus encouraging the widespread belief that the painting was an unsolvable puzzle. *American Art News* even offered a ten-dollar prize to the first reader who 'finds the lady' in Duchamp's painting and received hundreds of entries, nine of which the magazine's editors published. The *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, reporting on the New York exhibition for its local audience in Indiana, helped its readers understand the correct orientation of the work by floating the directional 'Top', 'Bottom', 'Left' and 'Right' around an image of the painting which it misleadingly described as 'a snapshot of nightmare.' The popular press wasted no time in humorously pillorying the *Nude Descending a Staircase [No.2]* in jokes, jingles, and caricatures, lampooning it with such memorable titles as J.F. Griswold's 'The Rude Descending a Staircase (Rush Hour at the Subway)', or Julian Street's 'Explosion of a Shingle Factory.' Even former President Theodore Roosevelt entered the fray, describing the painting as 'a misshapen nude woman, repellent from every standpoint.' He went on to compare the painting to 'a really good Navajo rug' in this bathroom, which, he stated, made for 'a far more satisfactory and decorative picture.' (Taylor, 2013, p.53)

The 'mysterious aura' around the painting did not dissipate. When, in 1916, the American journalist Nixola Greeley-Smith asked if it was a woman depicted in the image Duchamp answered: 'To tell you the truth, I have never thought about what it is. Why would I think about it? My paintings don't represent objects, but abstractions. *Nude Descending a Staircase* is an abstraction of movement.' (Duchamp cited in Naumann, 1994, p. 102). While the general pub-

lic was trying to figure out where the human form was depicted in the painting, Walter Pach could see beyond the 'flurry' that the scattered figure provoked in the critics and viewers.

It was with the support of Walter Pach that Duchamp became a sensation at the Armory Show. Pach understood the direction in which the nude's movement would go. He knew Duchamp's intentions from his visits to the Puteaux group and the imbroglio that the painting has previously caused in France. He was aware of the consequences that it would have and trusted that its display would represent a historical episode. Having this strong belief that they were on a mission to stir up the art circuit, the AAPS organizers, including Pach, delivered a premonitory statement in the Armory Show's opening speech:

This exhibition will be epoch making in the history of American art. Tonight will be the red-letter night in the history not only of American but of all modern art. The members of the Association felt that it was time the American people had an opportunity to see and judge for themselves concerning the work of the Europeans who are creating a new art. Now that the exhibition is a fact, we can say with pride that it is the most complete art exhibit that has been held in the world during the last quarter century. (Pach 1913, cited in Osborne, 2009, no pagination)

History has gone on to prove that the primary aim of the Armory show was indeed fulfilled. Nonetheless, the attention that Duchamp attracted in the USA did not immediately cross the Atlantic. Duchamp himself only found out about the impact that it had had weeks later (Tomkins, 2005). Then, Pach convinced him to navigate the ocean to breathe new air. As Duchamp wrote in a correspondence to Pach 'I am not going to New York, I am leaving Paris. That's quite different. [...] I already had a distaste for the artistic life I was involved in.' (Naumann & Obalk, 2000, p.36).

From Duchamp's arrival in the USA onwards, without the shadow of his elder brothers, his activities as an exhibition-maker expanded. It is worth remembering that Duchamp was originally the director of the installation of the Society of Independent Artists' exhibition in 1917, the same that rejected *Fountain*. It is important to note that he indeed took a democratic approach concerning the show that happened in the Grand Central Palace in New York and had around 2125 works by 1200 artists, larger than the Armory Show. Duchamp persuaded the rest of the committee to agree to install the artworks following an



alphabetical order, in which the first letter (that happened to be 'R') was chosen by chance, drawn from a hat (Tomkins, 2005). However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, his arguments were not convincing enough to enable R. Mutt's urinal to be included. Although, his involvement with the Society of Independent Artists did not result as Duchamp had planned, it eventually colluded in his foundational role in establishing a much more prominent society: the Société Anonyme, Inc.

The Société Anonyme, Inc. had its seed in the friendship between Duchamp and the American patron of the arts, curator, collector and artist Katherine Dreier (1877-1952). Duchamp met Katherine Dreier in 1916 through the Society of Independent Artists. After the refusal of *Fountain* in 1917, Duchamp resigned from the board of directors and wrote to Dreier, who was the director of the Society, to communicate that he would no longer collaborate with the organisation. Her letter to him, replying to his intention to leave, wrought what would be the beginning of a life-long comradeship and collaboration towards the propagation of a new art trend in the USA:

As a Director of the Society of Independent Artists I must use my influence to see whether you cannot reconsider your resignation. I feel there is nobody on the Board who can contribute exactly what you can. Those of us who are devoted to our country are very conscious of the commercial side and the lack of real appreciation of the beautiful in art or that art ought to be introduced into the simplest objects. I know you will forgive my being rather personal, but how can one emphasize our great need of you in the Society unless I am? Though I have only known you since our work threw us together I had naturally known of you long before; and when I found the personal sincerity to equal the sincerity of your painting, I was even more impressed by your originality. It is a rare combination to have originality of so high grade as yours combined with such strength of character and spiritual sensitiveness. (Dreier, 1917 cited in Gross, 2006, p.125)

Dreier's plea did not work and Duchamp did not retake his position in the Society of Independent Artists, but it set the foundation for other enterprises: 'The Société Anonyme, Inc.: Museum of Modern Art: 1920' launched in January 1920 in conjunction with another important friend of Duchamp's, the American photographer Man Ray (1890-1976).

As a co-founder, Man Ray was the one who suggested the name 'Société Anonyme'. As implausible as it may sound, current bibliography on the subject (for example in Tomkins, 2005) mentions that Man Ray had a poor command of French and misunderstood the expression. He thought that 'Société Anonyme' meant 'anonymous society' when in fact it means 'corporation' with all the commercial sub-layers of values that this word bears, which was not at all the purpose of the organization. Then, when Dreier and Duchamp were filling in the necessary paperwork to legally set up the organization, Duchamp incorporated the abbreviation 'Inc.' and Dreier the subtitle 'Museum of Modern Art: 1920.' (Clark, 2000). By adding 'Inc.' Duchamp would perpetrate a pun of words, with a translatable tautology. Instead of the usual double negative resulting in a positive, in this case a double affirmative would mean a negative. As for Dreier, by adding the subtitle, she officially legitimated the main goal behind the initiative. After three decades the Société Anonyme, Inc., left as legacy a large collection of Modern art. Man Ray's participation in the organization was more intense during the first years, when he was still in the formative period of his career. When he became an established artist, he scarcely participated. In the beginning, Dreier hired him to take photographs of the artworks and events for publicity and he also collaborated in setting up the exhibitions. The Société Anonyme also gave him incentive to operate the photo camera to create art. Before his involvement with the Société Anonyme, he was more inclined to draw and paint (Yale University Art Gallery, 1950). In this thesis, for now on, instead of the full name, we will read the name Société Anonyme as it became better known or the abbreviation S.A..

The long history of the Société Anonyme, from 1920 to 1950, is of special interest to formulate the account of Duchamp's responsibility regarding the enhancement of curatorial practice. From being the president – position that did not suit Duchamp's personality and for this reason did not last – he soon, in the same year as its inauguration, 1920, became the Head of Exhibitions of the Société Anonyme (Joselit, 2006; Bohan, 1982) and worked intensively with Dreier to bring and show international artists in the USA. The fact that he was designated 'Head of Exhibitions' is already undeniable proof of his major influence in curating and co-curating S.A.'s exhibitions and events.

The Société Anonyme's objective was to be the first 'experimental museum for contemporary art.' (Dreier 1926 cited in Gross, 2006, p. 1). When thinking about creating a museum, Dreier and Duchamp wanted to incorporate the notion of education and promotion of new artists. In the *Collection of the Société*

*Anonyme Catalogue*, published by the Yale University Art Gallery in 1950, together they wrote entries about each artist whose artworks were part of the collection. In the opening essay titled *The Aim and Motto*, Duchamp and Dreier declared the following as their foremost aim:

It is an International Organization for the promotion of the study in America of the Progressive in Art, based on Fundamental Principles, and to render aid in conserving the vigour and vitality of the new expressions of beauty in the Art of today and the motto 'Traditions are beautiful – but to create them – not to follow. (Dreier & Duchamp, 1950, p. XXIV).

One can find in this catalogue, which marked the cessation of the Société Anonyme's activities and the donation of its collection to Yale University, substantial evidence that Duchamp was of major influence on the S.A.'s objectives in terms of curating and exhibition-making. The attention given to Duchamp is the same that is given to Dreier. They were regarded as the driving force that enabled artists to show their art, one of contemporary curating's definitions as seen in this thesis' introduction. For example, George Hamilton, who was in charge of the S.A.'s collection in Yale, wrote the following words:

On April 30, 1950 the Société Anonyme celebrated and concluded thirty years of service to the cause of modern art. It is not too much to say that the record of the work undertaken by Katherine Dreier and Marcel Duchamp constitutes a heroic struggle for freedom of expression for the modern artist. At a time when there were no institutions in America dedicated to this art, and when most public museums seemed even unaware of the possibility of contemporary expression, they undertook to bring before all the people all over the country a knowledge of the modern movement. (Hamilton, 1950, p. XX)

In the introductory text signed only by Dreier she gives special thanks to Duchamp's perseverance and loyalty throughout all the three decades that they worked together adding: 'He stood by the work of the Société Anonyme, and without his constancy it could never have achieved its aim or reached its height.' (Dreier, 1950, XIII). Thus, one can perceive that Dreier herself openly acknowledged Duchamp's cooperation as the perfect supplement that elevated their collaborative enterprise. Further confirmations that Duchamp's curatorial

practice was relevant and complementary to Dreier's curating for the S.A. will be analysed in the course of this chapter.

According to Gross, already established at the inception of the Société Anonyme was the intention that 'its artist members would work together to encourage the spirit of modernism in America, and to express that spirit through exhibitions and programs.' (Gross, 2006, p. 3). For Duchamp, the objective of the S.A. could be expanded to other urgencies of the period: 'what was needed was to bring over paintings that permitted a confrontation of values... a comprehensive state of mind regarding contemporary art.' (Duchamp, 1946 cited in Gross, 2006, p. 7). They definitely fulfilled their expectations. Already in its first year, 1920, the Société Anonyme successfully organized six exhibitions in the set of rooms transformed into a gallery space that they rented in New York, in the building at 19 East, 47th Street (figure 26). In addition to that, they held sponsored lectures and Dada style events, such as poetry reading, in-house or in educational institutions. In fact, as they were not configured as a commercial gallery but as a new organizational system built based on a collaborative endeavour between artists and art thinkers, Dada chanced to become the main focus of the Société Anonyme in its first year. It was a result of the members' perception of what it is and how to be contemporary. Coincidentally or not, Dreier went to the Dada exhibition in Cologne and met the German Dada pioneer Max Ernst (1891 – 1976) in October 1919. He sent writings on Dada to her in Paris, which was her next destination. There, she met Duchamp and together they witnessed the unfolding of the Parisian Dada (Apter, 1998). With this background and an international network, the Société Anonyme's programme was key to 'introducing' the Dada "label" to the American scene.' (Apter, 1998, p.388). This Dadaistic beginning of the Société Anonyme highlighted its intention to be innovative and its commitment to 'enter a new era' in which 'men must in the very nature of things express themselves differently from the past whether it be in art, politics or science.' (Société Anonyme, Inc. Museum of Modern Art, 1923, no pagination) as described in the pamphlet *Its Why & Its Wherefore* printed on the occasion of the Société Anonyme's foundation and later re-edited in 1923. Its inaugural exhibition, however, was not marked by this Dada inclination, it offered a more heterogeneous dynamic to stage together 'works of men who are seriously trying to express the vision of their times' (Société Anonyme, Inc. Museum of Modern Art, 1923, no pagination).



FRONTISPIECE S. S.

Figure 26  
Exhibition rooms of the Société Anonyme, 1920.

The Société Anonyme's inaugural exhibition was the first show in which, in today's terms, we would say that Duchamp was the curator. Opened in April 1920, the exhibition at the S.A.'s gallery and main office included artworks, paintings and sculptures by 12 artists, including some that are now widely regarded such as Picabia, the Romanian Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) and the Spanish Juan Gris (1887–1927). As was to be expected, Duchamp included his own works, paintings by his brother Jacques Villon, by the fourth member of the exhibition committee the Italian born-American Futurist painter Joseph Stella (1877–1946) and works produced by the SA's co-founder Man Ray. There were also artworks by artists already dead at the time, the Dutch Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890) and the American early or proto-Modernist painters Morton Schamberg (1881–1918) and James Daugherty (1889–1974 in addition to lesser-known canvases by the French Dadaist Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes (1884–1974), by the American Cubist Patrick Henry Bruce (1881–1936) and the German expressionist painter Heinrich Vogeler.)

The democratic principle of the Société Anonyme, that wanted 'to promote Art and not personalities' (Dreier, 1941 cited in Yale University Art Gallery, 1950, p. IX) was woven into their inaugural exhibition. The selection was composed by a participative process, of which Duchamp was the chairman. There is no accurate record of how the choices were made, but there is evidence (Clark, 2001; Joselit, 2006 and Wilson, 2006) that the S.A. was based on a structure that favoured the opinions of each individual to find as a result a greater coherence among a diverse group (figure 27 depicts the exhibition flyer). This strategy in which there is less judgement and more encouragement was the premise not only of this premiere, but it remained as a postulation for the subsequent events thought up by the S.A. For example, in the case of this first show one can imagine that Vogeler's paintings with romantic themes and philosophical influences, as for example *The Island of Peace* (1918–1919, figure 28) stood out from the group. His paintings were probably included as they were connected to subjects that Dreier – a theosophical believer<sup>24</sup>, – appreciated and also due to the fact he was the sole German artist, a nation that was dear to her, not only due to her family re-

24 Theosophy is a spiritualist doctrine that condenses philosophical, religious and scientific elements inherent to various religions and cultures. The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 in New York and promulgated anti-materialistic principles and a notion that there was a 'divine wisdom' that would govern a world of unknown dimensions that only could be visible to men through meditation and self-knowledge. It was largely popular during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century within artistic circles, especially among artists who were researching abstractionism, due to the platonic belief in purer universal forms beyond the material. The Russian Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), for instance, wrote his 1912 treatise on *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* inspired by Theosophy. (Klein, 2005).

EXHIBITION

April 30th to June 15th.

Societe Anonyme, Inc.,  
open its

First Exhibition of Modern Art  
on  
Friday the 30th of April 1920

Van Gogh  
Villon  
\*Vogler  
Stella  
Schamberg  
Ribemont  
Picabia  
Man Ray  
Gris  
Duchamp  
Dougherty  
Brancusi  
Bruce

19 East 47th Street

New York

Gallery open Daily except  
Sundays.

Mondays from 2 to 6 o'clock.

Saturdays " 10 to 6 o'clock.

Other Days" 11 to 5:30 o'clock.

SOCIETE ANONYME INC. has been founded for the study and research  
in the recent movements of Modern Art.

A small Reference Library on modern Art, covering all countries  
will be kept.

Exhibitions will be changed every six weeks.

No sales will be made, but prospective buyers will be referred  
direct to the artists.

ADMISSION: A charge of 25 cts. is asked to meet the running  
expenses of the Gallery.

A yearly Admission Card can be had at \$5.00

A yearly Admission Card can be had at \$20.00 which will admit  
schools or groups.

CONTRIBUTIONS: Societe Anonyme asks for the support of its  
undertaking by all those who feel the need  
of the United States to keep abreast of the  
times in the Art World

Any contribution now increases our strength.

Those contributing \$500.00 or more, are Founders.

Those contributing \$10.00 or more, receive a Card of Admission  
and a report at the end of the year.

Figure 27

Société Anonyme's First Exhibition Flyer, 1920



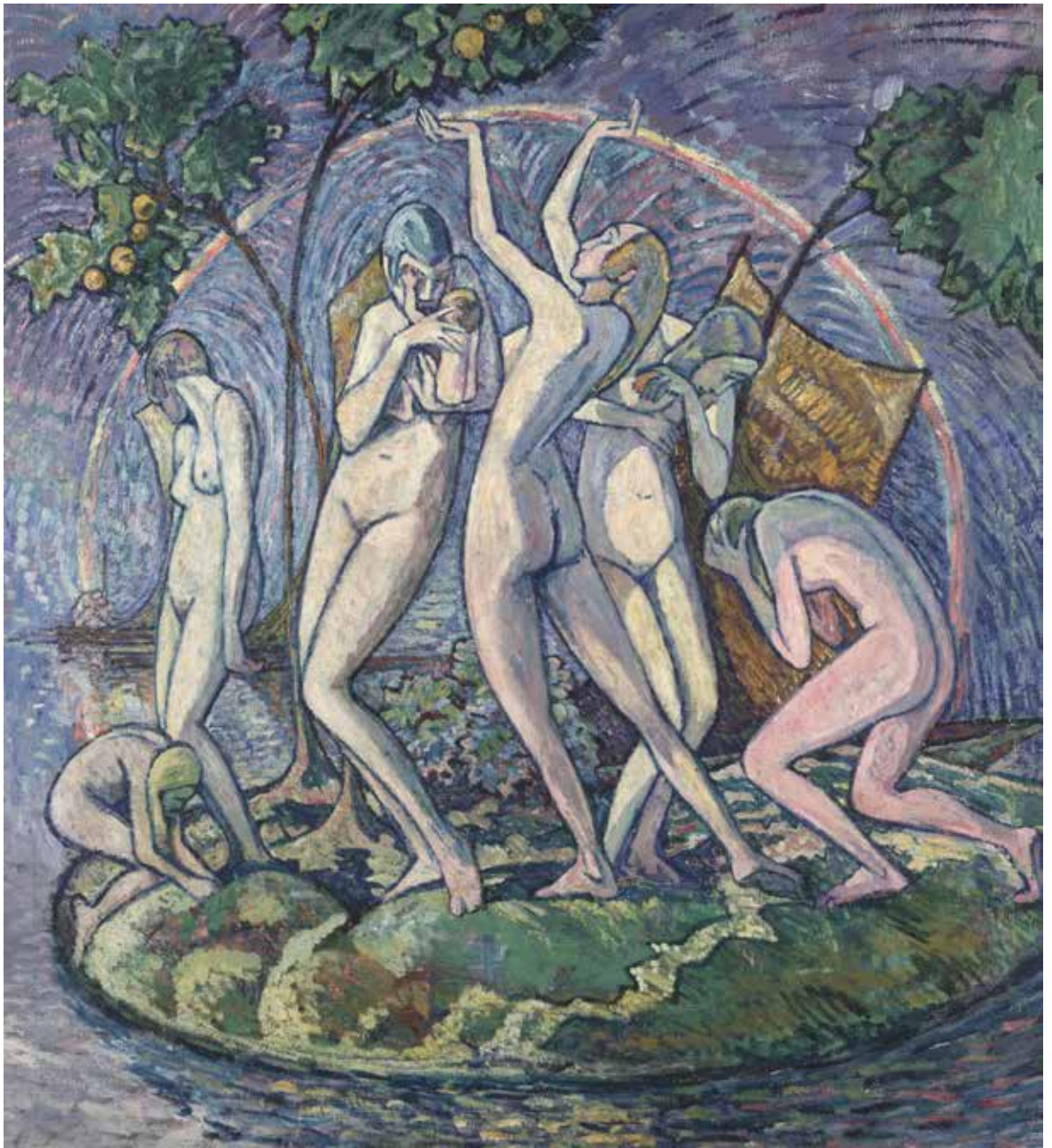


Figure 28  
*The Island of Peace*  
Vogeler, H. (1918-1919).  
Available at: <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/island-peace>  
(Accessed 18 November 2016)  
Oil on canvas  
104.5 x 96.5 cm



lationship (her parents were German immigrants) but also because of initiatives that combine Modern art and education, a strong characteristic of the German art scene (Clark, 2001). It must not be forgotten that it was two years after the end of the First World War, and Dreier, who suffered criticism in America for her German heritage, perhaps wanted to send a message with this particular piece.

The first show is also a sample of the openness and complex mixture of people that the organisation represented. They aimed to be international, not only presenting international artists to the USA audience but also integrating these artists into the local art scene. In this light, Duchamp as a curator did not play the role of an evaluator who has to make decisions regarding what to leave in and what to take out. It can be assumed that all members involved in putting the show together embraced this task. Duchamp who had turned up his nose at judgmental opinion in art before and expressed this feeling until his death, would not have taken on this assignment under those circumstances<sup>25</sup>. Acting less as an arbitrator but much more as a mediator, Duchamp designed the show to best represent the artists, their countries and the S.A.'s aims. Already in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his curatorial practice had a much more contemporary function. His duty was to present the artworks to their maximum capabilities, connecting and presenting them to the public in such a manner that the visitors could make the most of the experience.

There are no remaining photographs of the display, but through reports it seems that it was not dense like other previous exhibitions that promoted Modern Art. Yet, there is a photograph of the gallery dated from 1920 (which illustrates p.6 of the 2006 book by Gross) but it does not completely match the description of the inaugural show. There one can clearly see that the gallery was not filled to excess with artworks.

As has been revealed researching the aforementioned shows: Society of Independent Artists, the Gold Section or even the Armory Show, it was customary for exhibition halls to be over-crowded during this period. Although, Germano Celant (2005) in the essay *A Visual Machine: Art installation and its modern archetypes* tells us that the Armory Show in New York was also original in relation to the exhibition plan. The show had introduced within Modernism a new

25 'In a word, do less self-analysis and enjoy your work without worrying about opinions, your own as well as that of others.' wrote Duchamp to his brother-in-law Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp (Naumann and Obalk, 2000, p. 321), both were artists and they often consulted Duchamp about their own practices. In this letter from 1952, a mature Duchamp shattered all judgmental tendencies in the art world and summarized his piece of advice in this sentence.

system of display. According to the author it heightened the visitor's awareness throughout its configuration, carefully planned to present such a large number of artworks (Celant, 2005). As in the other previous exhibitions of its type, the number of artworks was large, but the space dedicated to the show was also enormous: two hectares. There were empty gaps between each artwork that let them 'breathe' individually.

Observing images of the installation we can see that these intervals were larger than usual, but perhaps it would be forcing it to say that the open space was exceptional, as the author implies. If we considered that one of the rooms had 17 works by Matisse – 13 paintings, three drawings and a sculpture – plus another fifty paintings by other French artists, it would still seem overcrowded for today's curatorial practice. However, following Celant's analysis, he also addresses that each of the octagonal rooms built for the show had an open view to the subsequent room that allowed the visitor to glimpse the next set of artworks before getting there. For Celant (2005), this emphasised how the display was set up with the objective of also enhancing the visitor's experience and a principle of dynamic perception, in his words it supported a qualitative presentation rather than quantitative. In comparison with other displays that had the intention of commercializing work of arts he says:

The organization of the show is, therefore, planned so as to expand the territory and influence of the individual works. The delineation of large open spaces around the works of art serves several purposes: it supplies positive evidence of cultural production, but also indicates a selection based on that production rather than on consumption. (Celant, 2005, p.263)

As we have mentioned, Duchamp did not visit the Armory show, but certainly he would have perceived the concept. As we will see in the following description of his first work as a curator, his exhibition layout bespoke that the empty space inside the gallery is also significant to the comprehension of the art on display. According to a review written by the American critic Henry McBride, the word that would best described the show was 'neat' (McBride 1920 cited in Joselit, 2006, p.39). For Wilson (2006), comparing the exhibition checklist that included 16 to 20 artworks and the space given (the blueprint shows that the first room was around 6.5 m x 4.5 m and the second 4.5 m x 4.7 m) presumably:

Despite the small space, the works on display seem not to have been clustered tightly (...) it is likely that Dreier and Duchamp, head of the exhibitions committee, preferred to show fewer works with more wall space for each' (Wilson, 2006, p.77).

Thus, it was not without reason that the first show that we can say Duchamp curated was considered to have a pleasingly orderly look.

Duchamp well understood that the art exhibited was already remarkably strong to the audience of the time. It was 1920, in New York, and apart from the Armory Show and the Gallery 291, created and managed by the photographer Stieglitz, (that was actually popular among his circle of friends and acquaintances, but did not reach a greater public, it was in operation from 1905 – 1917), the S.A.'s inaugural show was one of the first efforts to display Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and Dadaism in the same room. Besides the novelties already existent among the group of 'isms', the artworks themselves contained too much information for the audience to grasp in one fell swoop. Thus, it is reasonable that Duchamp decided to fill the space with the least information possible. He hid the imposing wooden floor and covered it with a neutral grey ribbed rubber. Moreover, his project camouflaged the interior decoration of the gallery that was dated, coming into vogue during the Civil War and carpentered to expose the grain of the wood (Joselit, 2006). There was almost an attempt to make the gallery space disappear, to be invisible, as the artworks were standing there without firm foundations to be hung on. They would have only a visual connection between each other, but not with the surrounding space, the ambiance would have no appeal. Could this be the beginning of the White Cube exhibition design style? We will track down this question later on this chapter. For now, we can find a sharp description of the exhibition in McBride's review<sup>26</sup>:

26 The American art critic Henry McBride (1867–1962) is known as an earlier supporter of Modernism artists in the USA and one of the most open-minded critics of his time (Tomkins, 2005, p. 207 and 271). Coincidentally, he started to cover visual arts for the newspaper *The New York Sun* at the same year of the Armory Show, in 1913, when Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase n°2* made the headlines. He became a SA member in 1921 and worked with Duchamp in a SA publication named 'Some French Moderns Says McBride' designed and edited by Duchamp who selected some of McBride's article from *The Sun*. According to Naumann and Obalk, the critic had written in 1932: 'When Marcel was here [in US] we almost got to the point of thinking that art consists of things rather than the painted reflection of them.' (Naumann & Obalk, 2000, p. 110). But concerning art critics and their judgmental attitudes, Duchamp, talking about the SA, wrote in a letter to his sister and Jean Crotti, in October 1920: 'The Société Anonyme is a gallery where you exhibit but don't sell. It costs 25 cents to go in. People find it hard to part with their 25 cents. My first idea was to charge critics 50 cents. But they don't come at all. Apart from that, it's the only thing of any interest in N.Y. Nothing else.' (Naumann and Obalk, 2000, p.93).

But however that may be, the Société Anonyme, Inc., has covered its walls with a pale bluish white oilcloth than which nothing could be purer, and tinted the fireplace and wood work to match. (...) It seems to have been chosen for its quality of texture and colour, and not at all with the idea of insuring firmer foothold for tottering Academicians who drift into these precincts in search of ideas. (McBride, 1920 cited in Joselit, 2006, p. 39).

Taking into account his observations on the material applied, we could even go further and interpret the use of rubber and oilcloth more substantially. They are both waterproofing and they are manufactured to serve this purpose. In the material's essence resides the intention to make the surroundings impenetrable or something that will never overflow. An exhibition space that is completely covered by these fabrics, metaphorically speaking, has its old setting 'concealed' and the new artworks can communicate between themselves without being tainted by an antique style. It refrains the influence that tradition would have upon the pieces shown there.

Nevertheless, a detail stitched together the artworks presented, at least the two-dimensional ones. Duchamp has framed the paintings with strips of lace paper as can be seen in Man Ray's photograph of Jacques Villon's painting *In Memoriam* (1919, figure 29) which presents what was added by Duchamp to the other paintings. The neatness seen and documented by the art critic would be scratched by an ornamental yet distressing decoration. McBride continued his appraisal saying:

Of examples of old fashioned cubism there are Mr. [George Ribemont-] Dessaignes' 'Silence'<sup>27</sup>, in which noise enters a scarlet funnel at the top of the picture and comes out congealed, certainly silent, in a blue mass at the bottom; Jacques Villon's clever still life<sup>28</sup>; admirable Brooklyn Bridges by James Daugherty and Joseph Stella<sup>29</sup>; and a strong still life by [Patrick Henry] Bruce; and all these paintings are framed in strips of lace paper. (McBride, 1920 cited in Joselit, 2006, p. 39)

As Joselit in the essay 'The Artist Readymade' has pointed out in McBride's review, the lace gained a feminine connotation and the critic pondered about a confrontation between genders 'in which masculinized artworks

27      Figure 30

28      Figure 31

29      Figure 32



FIGURE

S.S.

JACQUES VILLON

S©A

Black Border Not Wanted.

Figure 29  
In Memoriam  
Jacques, V. (1919).  
Photographic print, b&w  
17.3 x 11.1 cm

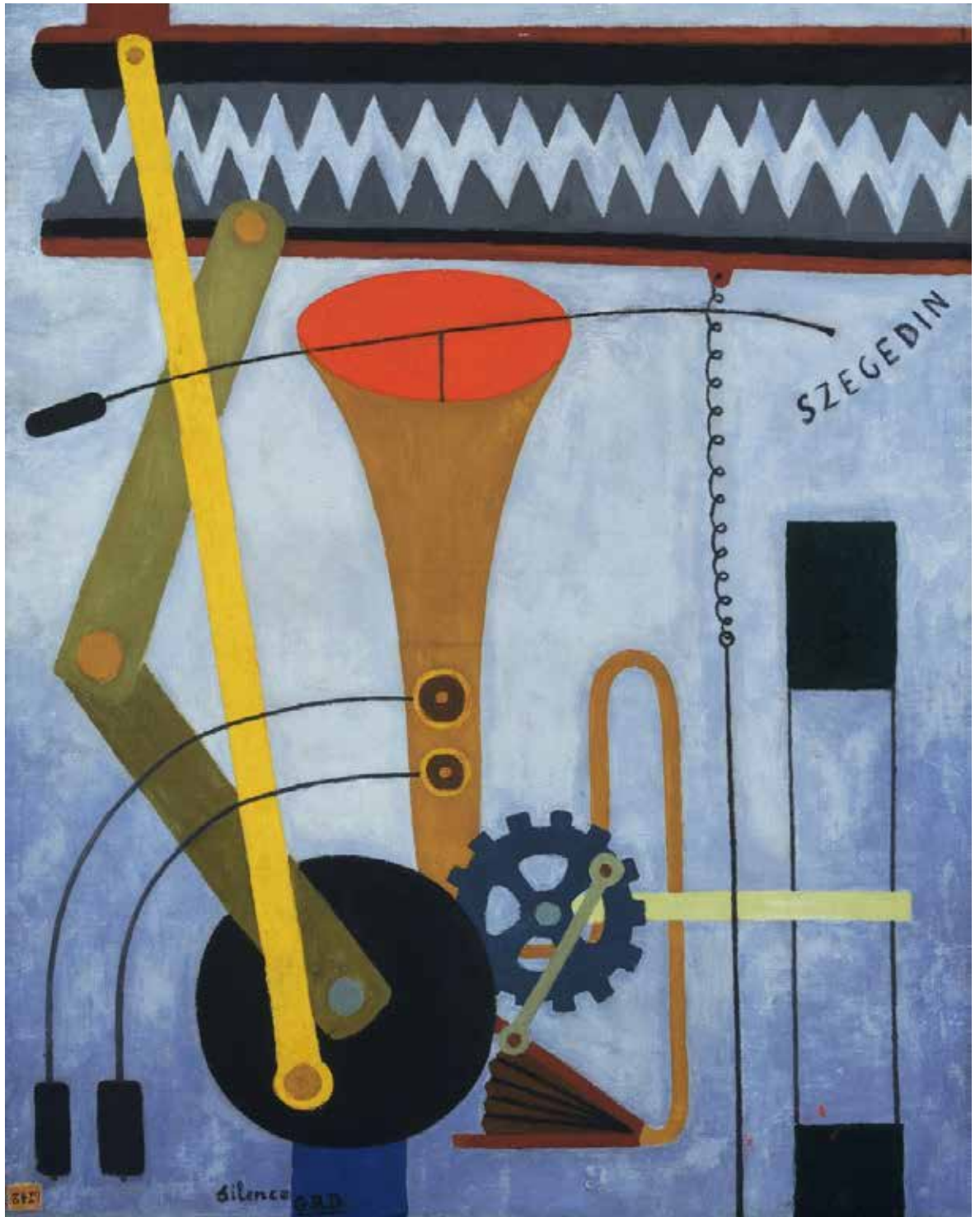


Figure 30  
 Silence  
 Ribemont-Dessaignes, G. (1915)  
 Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79079?locale=en>  
 (Accessed 18 November 2016)  
 Oil on canvas  
 92.1 x 73.3 cm





Figure 31  
Still Life (*Déjeuner, La Table servie, Nature morte*)  
Villon, J. (1912-1913).  
Oil on burlap  
88.9 x 116.1 cm



Figure 32  
Brooklyn Bridge  
Stella, J. (1918-1920).  
Oil on Canvas  
215.3 x 194.6 cm



occupied a feminized salon.’ (Joselit 2006, p.39). One can understand this as a biased discourse that can be evaluated while taking into account when it was written. Nonetheless, other Duchamp experts such as Francis Naumann<sup>30</sup> argued that is inevitable to identify a certain feminine ambivalence, when it was also in 1920 that Rose Sélavy, Duchamp’s female alter ego, had emerged. Her first signed work *Fresh Widow* is dated from this same year (figure 33). It is a small French window, the title carries a self-explanatory pun of words with the object, which consisted of panels covered with black leather, thus it does not let anyone see thorough its glass panes, something atypical for Duchamp, who had already played with transparency and would later explore the idea of peep holes. But, as curator Maria Müller-Schareck (2012) remarks, Duchamp’s purpose with the leather was literally to block the view, but also to induce the viewers to find themselves in opposition to the artwork:

By recommending that the leather be polished daily, like shoes, he offered a substitute for the visual experience it prevented: in the reflective leather, viewers would faintly see themselves and thus be all the more aware of the view through being denied’. (Müller-Schareck, 2012, p. 20)

At the bottom of this piece one can find the inscription in capital letters ‘FRESH WIDOW COPYRIGHT ROSE Sélavy 1920’.

Besides the speculative link to the gender connotation, what is more significant to us here is the poignant reflection upon the notion and function of frame that Duchamp explicitly put on display. George Baker in the article *Leather and Lace* insightfully noted that *Fresh Widow* is a frame in itself:

Evidently, it concerns not just the death of painting and of the (male) author, but the object status of the frame as well. It cedes the activity of painting to the knowledge of the industrial designer or traditional craftsman. It operates a displacement of the medium by an architectural fragment. It imagines painting transformed into an object that can be handled and even literally opened, not only entered into contemplatively or imaginatively. (Baker, 2010, p. 126)

As investigated by Baker (2010) it was also in 1920 that this topic grabbed the attention of Duchamp and his peer Picabia. The author unearthed the collaborative dialogue between the two artists through an interesting anal-

30 In conversation with Caroline Menezes, in November 2014, in his gallery in New York.



Figure 33  
 Fresh Widow  
 Duchamp, M. (1920)  
 Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81028>  
 (Accessed 18 November 2016)  
 Miniature French window, painted wood frame, and panes of glass covered with black leather  
 77.5 x 44.8 cm, on wood sill 1.9 x 53.4 x 10.2 cm

ysis of the use of framing. For Picabia whose paintings normally had specially designed frames, the frame was not only functional but an element that conceptualised his artistic questions. He would use it as a tool for his artistic process. He would experiment with materials such as snakeskin, work together with a craftsman to design unpredictable shapes or play with assemblages such as pasting butterflies on the paintings' borders. For Duchamp, in his artwork and in his curatorial practice, to overturn the notion of frame would eventually destabilize the position of the viewer and how the viewer sees and comprehends art.

What could be seen as a playful gesture of the young Head of Exhibitions of the Société Anonyme in fact can be seen as the seminal movement towards a shift in the exhibition display system. By replacing the frames with paper dollies in this pioneering show of the S.A. Museum of Modern Art, he would gradually dissolve the rigid order of things, starting with an exemplar and constitutive element in art tradition, the frame that encases the picture. Baker (2010) observers more adjoined layers in this action:

This notion of dialogue as the ‘misfit’ of modernist form is one that I find useful in several ways. First, in histories of art, dialogue is usually considered to be an extrinsic concern: part of a framing apparatus, or what art history might otherwise call ‘context,’ but most definitely outside of any given work of art. What if dialogue were instead the substance of a work of art? And what if an artistic dialogue didn’t frame a work of art, but was enacted upon the frame, on the very borderline between what is or is not considered the work of art, what is or is not inside or outside of the realm of art? What if, indeed, rather than belonging to a framing convention, a central part of the Duchamp, Man Ray, and Picabia dialogue was literally about frames? (Baker, 2010, p. 119)

Later in his essay, Baker explains that: ‘It is clear, in other words, that “framing” in the Duchamp–Picabia dialogue serves less to isolate and define an object than to suspend its ontological fixity, to make it paradoxically porous and open’. (Baker, 2010, p.127). In Duchamp’s first curatorial exhibition plan, the frame that typically demarcates the canvas is subverted, instead of defining the pictorial plane it is the stressing border between the environment and the avant-garde art. Joselit has made interesting remarks on this particular aspect:

In a proto-Derridean move, this installation emphasized the ‘leakage’ between object and environment by insisting on the centrality of framing. [...] In lace he found a material signifying not only the feminine ‘frames’ of clothing or curtains but an abstract texture that is ‘all frame’ – a tracery of lines delineating a pattern of gaps. If Jacques Derrida understood the frame as standing against two grounds – the work on the one hand and its surroundings of the other – Duchamp’s deployment of lace suggests a further destabilization by establishing between figure and ground a permanent oscillation that is internal to the frame. (Joselit, 2006, p.40).

The author makes reference to the French philosopher Derrida (1987) whose writings about painting are condensed in the 1978 book *De la vérité en peinture* in which he gives special importance to a metaphorical reading of the *passe-partout* and frame as the fine edge between the work of art and the world. Derrida questions the category of the work of art as a closed entity, containing a significant essence that would be capable of being demonstrated or decoded by presenting its internal constitutive elements and submitting for analysis the external influences from its production’s context.

The Derridean ideas refer first of all to the notion of space and temporality in which the work of art is circumscribed. In the beginning of his book Derrida explains: 'One space remains to be broached in order to give place to the truth in painting. Neither inside nor outside, it spaces itself without letting itself be framed but it does not stand outside the frame' (Derrida, 1987, p.11).

We can understand this affirmation as an insight into the vision of the juxtaposition of meanings applied to the activity of placing artworks together, and present them as a 'conceptual framework,' in other words, the exhibition making. In the S.A.'s inaugural show, we could see two clearly different situations that implicated the conceptual intervention of Duchamp as a curator. The dichotomy between the neatness of the space (the idea of making it impenetrable) and the wrapping of the paintings with ordinary yet expressive paper frame discloses Duchamp's attention to context. In the same way that he thwarted tradition, clearing the place where the artworks were displayed, he also playfully experimented with paper dollies that lent significances to the paintings and concurrently made the whole set of paintings equal in a certain manner.

## **2.2 SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME AND THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF MODERN ART**

From its notable beginning, the Société Anonyme progressed in an exemplary manner and reached the record of a new show every five or six weeks, not only in its own space but also organising or lending artworks to exhibitions off-site. They had a gallery in New York which was open until May 1924, and during this period they organised 20 shows on its premises, including the first one-man show in America of important artists such the Ukrainian sculptor Alexander Archipenko (1887 – 1964) in 1921; Kandinsky, in 1923; and in the following year the Swiss-German painter Paul Klee (1879-1940). Their educational commitment also led them to arrange lectures, talks and symposiums such as 'Psychology of Modern Art' and 'Dadaism'. In fact, the S.A. intensely propagated Dada ideas. For instance, to celebrate its first anniversary they invited members and the general public to spend 'An Evening with Gertrude Stein' one of the most prominent Dada writers of the period.

The first couple of years were when the S.A.'s membership peaked. In February 1923 Duchamp returned to Europe and concurrently the S.A.'s membership began to decline. However, in spite of the lack of Duchamp's helpful presence – whose last task while in New York was to install Jacques Villon's first

solo show in the USA in the S.A.'s gallery –, Dreier continued to secure the S.A.'s activities but not without modifying some of the S.A.'s procedures.

You will recall that we deemed it necessary to give up our little Gallery, as we were confronted by a curious psychology of the American mind and that is that they could not understand that one could run a small gallery, consisting of a room and a library, on the basis of a museum. We think the increasing interest in our work has proven the value of our judgment. The change of attitude is very marked, for we are now being ask for, where formerly we had to seek. We are confronted, as usual here, with the strange situation that though our work is in ever greater demand by educational organizations from the Board of Education of New York City to colleges and museums, we have not the necessary support to do it adequately. Are we such pioneers? (Société Anonyme, Inc. Museum of Modern Art, 1927, p. 1)

As Dreier described in this fragment of the Société Anonyme's Financial Report that was sent to every single member, their gallery closed in 1927 not because of an exiguity of appreciation or insufficient activities but due to a certain discomfort for failing to make clear the ambition of the S.A. to be recognized as a museum. During subsequent years, Dreier tried to obtain a permanent house for the S.A, not similar to the 'little gallery' in a commercial building in NY, but in a proper art location, an edifice built for this purpose. Previously, in a letter to the Brooklyn Museum director, William Henry Fox, in July 1926, she had mentioned that the 'change of method of approach' by the S.A. was due to the fact that the 'little gallery caused confusion of mind and the average public thought we were a commercial gallery instead of a small experimental museum'. (Dreier, 19 July April 1926, Letter to W. Fox). This was her foremost concern, as since the foundation of the S.A. she had wishes to establish a museum and not an organization focused on financial profit.

Since the gallery's closure, Dreier had been particularly preoccupied with the art students that the S.A. ceased to assist due to the lack of a proper location and was looking for a room to at least make the S.A. library available to the public. She expressed her concern to the Brooklyn Museum's director and wondered if there was an office available there for the S.A. (Dreier, 19 July April 1926, Letter to W. Fox). Following lengthy correspondence by mail about this matter the request was denied. For years she kept working intensely to raise funds for the project of a definite place for the Société Anonyme, Inc. Museum of Modern Art,

but it never happened. The task became even more difficult later with the launch of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1929 that overshadowed the S.A.'s pioneering spirit and commitment (Kantor, 2002; Gross, 2006).

Consequently, even after the S.A. gallery had locked its doors, the Société Anonyme maintained its actions that were no longer so frequent but kept the same quality and goals. Nevertheless, in this second moment the Société Anonyme focused on alternative venues, as Kristina Wilson (2006) explained in the essay ‘“One Big Painting” A new View of Modern Art at the Brooklyn Museum’ that the experimental hanging pattern previously set up in initial exhibitions also had to undergo a sort of remodelling to adapt itself to the new institutions.

In search of alternative venues, she [Dreier] contacted several museums, hoping to find institutions that would broaden the audience of the Société Anonyme and also confer on it an imprimatur of legitimacy. In shifting from a small space to larger museums, the radical art of the Société Anonyme also left behind the self-conscious, intense artist atmosphere of the first display type and was reconfigured according to the traditions of the second salon-style display type. (Wilson, 2006, pp. 77-78).

As an example of this reshaping, Wilson cited a show assembled by the Société Anonyme in the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts that actually happened in November 1921. Although it happened before the closing of the S.A.'s gallery in New York, it suitably represents the adjustment needed when the S.A.'s collection was gathered together in a large and traditional institution.

The main bibliography regarding the Société Anonyme, as for example Yale University Art Gallery (1950) *Collection of the Société Anonyme: Museum of Modern Art 1920* or even Société Anonyme, Inc. Museum of Modern Art. (1927) *Financial Report*, states that the ‘little gallery’ closed in 1924. Moreover, the flyer for Kandinsky exhibition that opened in 23 March 1923 informed the address of the S.A. gallery as the inaugural show: 19 East, 47th Street. In the flyer for Paul Klee's first solo show in January 1924, the address is different, 44 West 57th Street, but it is still named Société Anonyme Inc. Museum of Modern Art, indicating the opening hours for visitation and the activity programme. Nevertheless, Wilson (2006) affirms differently in her essay saying that the S.A.'s gallery closing was in 1921. Despite the inaccuracy of the dates, her analysis of the digression in the S.A.'s curatorial approach in a traditional institution and principally her study

about the Brooklyn exhibition are extremely valid to this thesis. However, it is critical to point out that Wilson in her essay does not make Duchamp's function in the S.A.'s shows very explicit. In the case of the 1926 International Exhibition, the author gives much more credit to Dreier, but as we will see next, Duchamp had a major role in the curatorial project of this particular show.

The Worcester show (figures 34 and 35) comprised 59 artworks by 32 artists in a single room, with a neoclassical architecture composed of plaster mould lowering the ceiling and a dado rail at the bottom, components that reduced the walls' functional surfaces, and restraining the position of almost all the artworks to a single row. There were also resting places for the visitor to observe the work from the 'correct' position:

Whereas in the New York gallery visitors had been encouraged to consider the artworks in depth, in an intimate, enveloping environment, at the Worcester show visitors were presented with a dense arrangement and were invited (as the gallery couches indicate) to view the art from a distance at which its larger hanging pattern would be evident. At the Worcester Museum, then, modern art was presented as readily fitting into the established structures of the art-historical canon. (Wilson, 2006, pp.78-79)

The aforementioned show was the second largest exhibition ever assembled by the S.A., the largest one was the 1926 International Exhibition of Modern Art in the Brooklyn Museum<sup>31</sup> (figures 36, 37 and 38). Among the vast number of activities promoted by the S.A. – that in 30 years of operation comprised around 80 exhibitions (including travelling shows), 85 public programs and over 30 publications (Yale University Art Gallery, 1950) – the 1926 International Exhibition besides being the largest since the S.A.'s inauguration, was probably the one that became most famous and had the broadest impact.

Differently from the other hangings in traditional institutions, the 1926 International Exhibition encountered in the Brooklyn Museum a place where the organization could freely exercise the 'experimental museum's' goals. One reason for that is that the museum in Brooklyn did not bear the conventional image that other institutions for the Fine Arts had. Despite it is being one of the oldest museums in the USA – its history dates back to 1823 (Philadelphia

31 The complete title in the catalogue is The International Exhibition of Modern Art arranged by the Société Anonyme for the Brooklyn Museum. In the Brooklyn Museum Archives it appears under the same name but as 'assembled by' the S.A. In this thesis it will be called simply International Exhibition.



Figure 34  
Société Anonyme exhibition, Worcester Art Museum, November – December 1921  
Installation view



Figure 35  
Société Anonyme exhibition, Worcester Art Museum, November – December 1921  
Installation view





Figure 36  
International Exhibition of Modern Art (1926-1927). Brooklyn Museum. Installation view.



Figure 37  
International Exhibition of Modern Art (1926-1927). Brooklyn Museum. Installation view.



Figure 38  
International Exhibition of Modern Art (1926-1927). Brooklyn Museum. Installation view.

Museum of Art, 2000) – it was formerly a combination of library and lyceum that held a growing collection of ancient art, ethnographic pieces and natural sciences artefacts, and from 1846 a permanent gallery of fine arts.

It was under the umbrella of The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, together with the Botanic Garden, Academy of Music, Children's Museum and Department of Education (Wythe, 2004). The fact that since its beginning it was meant to be an educational place for young people to learn, study and experiment within their careers might have helped to dissolve the rigid notion that museums are stringent places to keep art protected. In 1890, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science began the plan for a new building structure to house its collection in a permanent display. It was a slow process. In 1897, part of the new edifice, the West Wing, was opened to the public as Central Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, but many construction sites still needed to be worked on. For instance, the interior of a large space to what became the

Beaux-Arts Court dedicated solely to art shows was only finished in 1926, coincidentally the year of the S.A.'s International Exhibition.

In 1914, William Henry Fox, former Curator in Chief, was appointed Museum Director. He was the first to undertake this position as it was in this year that the building housing a wide-range of collections was officially denominated Brooklyn Museum. The change of name also provided modifications to its configuration. Fox succeeded in attaching importance to fine and applied arts, expanded their departments and acquired contemporary art pieces to remodel the museum's image, so it would be more artistically oriented (New York Art Resources Consortium, n.d.). It is worth noting that he was also a member of the Société Anonyme and had considerable respect for Dreier's work. In 1925 he let her curate an exhibition of her deceased sister's paintings, Dorothea Dreier, and put together a show of Katherine Dreier's photographs from China in February 1926. Later in 1950, Dreier and Duchamp in turn, summarized their amicable mutual collaboration in these words:

We [Dreier and Duchamp] want to express our deep admiration for Dr. William Henry Fox who built up the unknown Brooklyn Museum until it had an international reputation of high standing. It was his love for art, unhampered by prejudice or tradition, which enabled him to perceive the contribution of the new forms in art which the Société Anonyme presented through their exhibitions. In opening the doors of his museum to the now famous International Exhibition held there in 1926, he established the recognition of modern art in this country. (Yale University Art Gallery, 1950, p. XVI).

Another important fact that made the International Exhibition distinctly remarkable was to a great extent Duchamp's participation in the curatorial project. Although living in Paris, Duchamp was, from the beginning to the end, involved in the concept and elaboration of what would be S.A.'s most memorable show. According to Ruth Bohan, author of the 1982 book *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition* for Dreier, Duchamp's acceptance as her partner in this endeavour was absolutely critical to the show's realization. Dreier contacted Duchamp regarding this matter when the negotiations with the Brooklyn Museum were still at an earlier stage. She wanted to be sure that he would undertake the role to organize and assemble the show with her before moving forward. She wrote to Duchamp to solicit his help saying that 'You know that Modern Art does something to people which they need very much.' (Dreier to Duchamp, Janu-

ary 10, 2016, cited in Bohan, 1982, p.45). After the dates of the exhibition were set and before she initiated her research trip to Europe, even though she knew that Duchamp had accepted the task and would receive her in Paris, she wrote again to Duchamp giving special emphasis to just how important his opinion was to her:

I must talk over the situation in art with you, [...] you have always stimulated me to a deeper and more profound analization [sic] than any one I know. And I need you especially now as the Brooklyn Museum is giving me absolute freedom of selection.' (Dreier to Duchamp, March 7, 1926, cited on Bohan, 1982, p.45).

Once in Paris, Dreier carefully listened to Duchamp's comments about the local art scene. He prepared 'guided tours' to walk Dreier to galleries, museums and artist's studios. Duchamp was also responsible for coordinating the shipment of some artworks (Bohan, 1982). But more important than anything else, he advised her unconditionally about the selection of artworks (Bohan, 1982). For instance, the hard choice of leaving recent artworks by already well-known artists Picasso and Braque out of the show was a decision in which Duchamp had the final word. As Bohan reported 'Duchamp considered it unnecessary to include "such successfully marketed stuff" in Dreier's "exhibition efforts"' (Bohan, 1982, p.53). She complied with his request without hesitation. In the final selection only earlier paintings by these artists that were already in American collections were included.

This example of cooperation between Duchamp and Dreier is unlike what happened between Dreier and other artists, proving that her partnership with Duchamp was of co-curatorial partners. According to Bohan, 'She and Duchamp had doubtlessly already reached a tentative agreement about which of the German artists should be included' (Bohan, 1982, p.47). Thus, she went to Germany, a country that she was already very familiar with, to carry out the same research she had done in France. Duchamp did not join her this time. One of the enthusiasts associated with the show's organisation was Kandinsky, who at the time was already living in Germany and teaching at the Bauhaus school in Weimar. This did not hinder him from also undertaking the position of Vice-president of the S.A. He separated some of his own paintings to show to Dreier and asked other members of the Bauhaus to do so too. Eventually, when Dreier arrived, she had a partial selection from which she could choose what would represent the school. Kandinsky facilitated the re-search but even as Vice-President he did not play a directorial role.

Before meeting Kandinsky at the Bauhaus, Dreier headed to Hannover in order to see the German multi-media artist Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), whose first piece exhibited in the USA was in a group show in the S.A.'s gallery in 1921. She openly admired him but had never met Schwitters in person. In preparation for the meeting, the artist wrote to Dreier and offered his help in giving names to the German section. She was extremely reticent about his 'unsolicited generosity'. She wrote back to him explaining that 'before any decisions were made, the two should discuss matters very carefully' (Bohan, 1982, p.47). This anecdote demonstrates that Dreier's trust in Duchamp was incomparable to the relationship she had with any other artist.

It was not a relationship between patron and artist, but rather, it was a horizontal liaison, a dialogue between peers, she was a curator and Duchamp was also a curator. In fact, perhaps the manner, in which she perceived Duchamp's actions, since the *Fountain* episode, indicates that she actually regarded him as a mentor. After Germany, Dreier went to Italy where Duchamp went to meet her to outline the Italian section of the exhibition. He went with Dreier to Milan and during her visit to the Venice Biennial. Regarding the groundwork for the 'big' show, Dreier wrote in April 1926, to Fox:

I have been so torn between wishing you were here in Paris to share the pleasure I have had the last two weeks in choosing the pictures for our big International Exhibition and glad to know that you were spared the hard work it involved, that at times I do not know which sentiment predominates. [...] I find I could easily have spent months here instead of just three weeks, but in spite of all I am very happy at my success and I think you will be delighted with what I am bringing over. I am sure that you will be glad with me to hear that the chances are that in spite of the high standard I have determined on, besides the condition that the works chosen be imbued with the new spirit, I shall most likely have eighteen countries represented. This, I think, is quite an achievement. [...] Fortunately through Marcel Duchamp, who has been such a wonderful aid to me and alone has made it possible to accomplish what I set out to do in so short a space of time. (Dreier, 13 April 1926, Letter to W. Fox, pp. 1-2)<sup>32</sup>.

In its final format, the show actually covered 20 European countries mostly from France, Germany and Russia, one artist from Canada and another

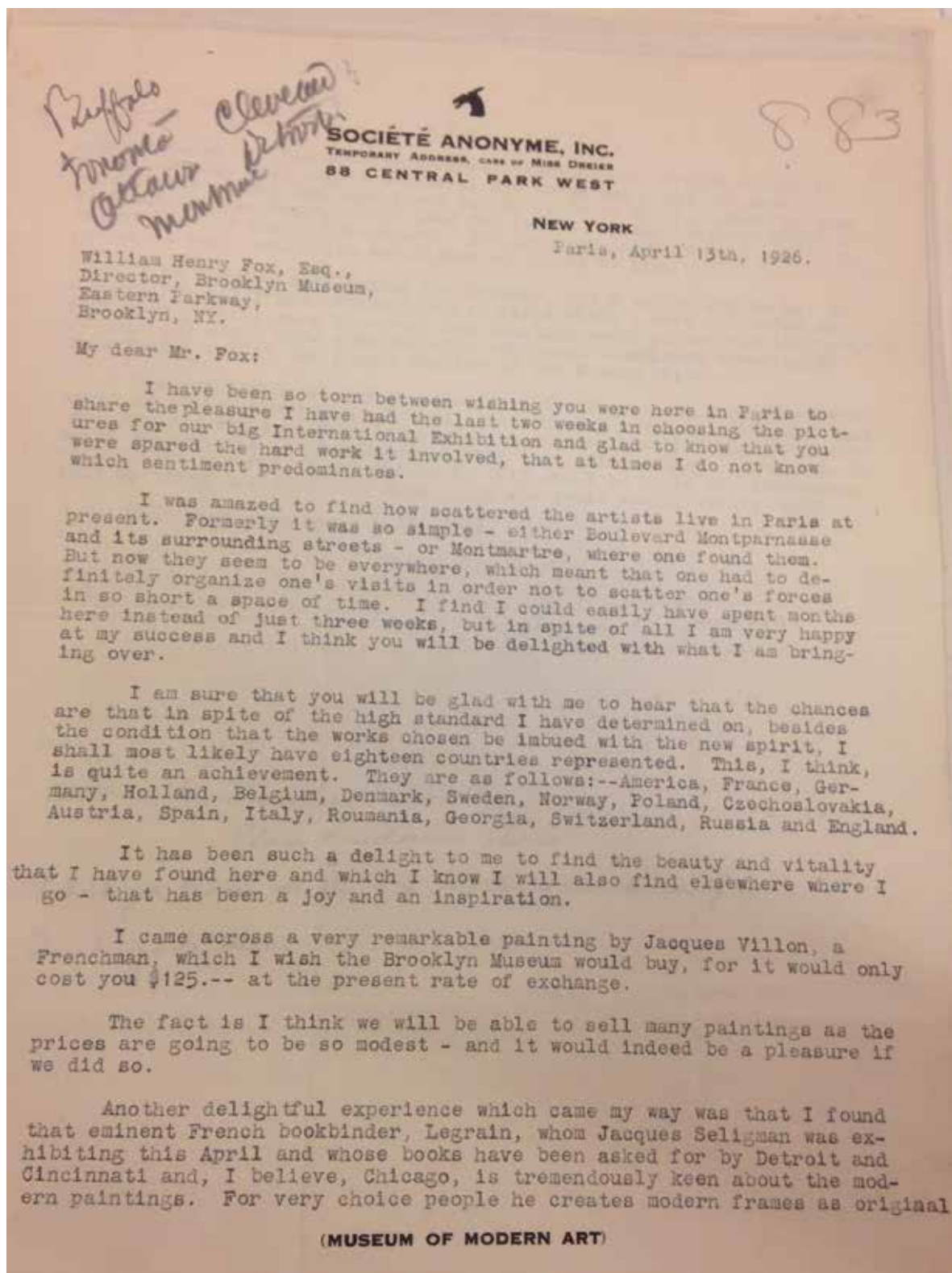


Figure 39a  
Dreier, 13 April 1926, Letter to W. Fox, p. 1



- 2 -

and unique as the pictures themselves. Fortunately through Marcel Duchamp, who has been such a wonderful aid to me and alone has made it possible to accomplish what I set out to do in so short a space of time, Monsieur Legrain consented to make two frames for two pictures which I bought for the coming Exhibition. The Barbazanges Gallery is having at present a very remarkable exhibition of frames by him.

I am leaving next Monday for Germany, but I wanted you to get an account of what I had accomplished in Paris where I have collected approximately fifty-nine pictures, not counting water colors and lithographs, so that you would have some definite statement to ~~make~~ when speaking of this Exhibition at the Annual Meeting of the Museum Directors.

I am enclosing a copy of a letter which I wrote to Miss Evans who asked my advice about Diego Rivera. As you will notice I mentioned that perhaps you would be much interested in showing the sketches for these mural decorations at your Museum during the coming season. Arthur B. Davies bought several of his things in 1913 and I am under the impression that he liked his work very much - but you could easily verify this.

With warm greetings, believe me,

Faithfully yours,

*Katherine V. Dreier*

1.

Address G. Baukhus Truck Co.  
Place Vendôme Paris.

Mail for home on the S.S. Rotterdam June 19<sup>th</sup>  
things to Mrs. Fry.

Figure 39b  
Dreier, 13 April 1926, Letter to W. Fox, p. 2

from Japan and also 27 American artists (figure 40 depicts the catalogue cover). The catalogue was also very important for the co-curators Dreier and Duchamp, and for this reason, they gave special attention to its design, as shown in this letter they signed together to the museum's director. It demonstrates that their pre-occupation as curators was beyond exhibition-making:

The Société takes great pleasure in presenting to the Brooklyn Museum a copy of our Special Catalogue for its Library and we are sending it to you under separate cover. It appears to be a fitting complement to the Exhibition held under your auspices, for those who know typography in this country state that it is an epoch-making achievement to have a catalogue done in so modern spirit – in fact it is the first of its kind in this country (Dreier and Duchamp, 27 January 1927, Letter to W. Fox, p.1)

Dreier and Duchamp could also count on the local support of Alfred Stieglitz who lent works that remained from his commercial gallery 291 (already closed by this period) to the S.A.'s show. In total, there were more than 300 artworks by 106 artists, which led Dreier to negotiate extra room in the Brooklyn Museum to accommodate the complete selection of pieces. In the subsequent letter sent from Europe, Dreier said she believed that more space would be needed to

be able to take the whole exhibition' and asked the director 'not to plan definitely for any other exhibition' at his Museum, until her return, when she would immediately 'get in touch to talk over the whole exhibition' (Dreier, 5 May 1926, Letter to W. Fox)<sup>33</sup>

Eventually, she conquered an extra space for the S.A.'s bold curatorial project: Fox told Dreier that the exhibition 'will be arranged in one of the top-lighted galleries, with the over-flow, if any, in a side-lighted gallery'" (Letter from Fox to Dreier cited in Wilson, 2006, p.94).

The preparations to attain a successful show were going smoothly. Crates containing dozens of artworks were arriving in New York, when on 14 October 1926 Duchamp boarded a ship to the USA to personally accompany the installation of the works. Besides his primary responsibility to the S.A., he would later go to Chicago to organize the solo show of Brancusi at the Arts Club. According to Naumann & Obalk (2000), Duchamp brought from Paris around 20 of Brancusi's sculptures that got confiscated by the US Customs as they denied

33 Image of the primary source: figure 41, letter from Dreier to Fox.



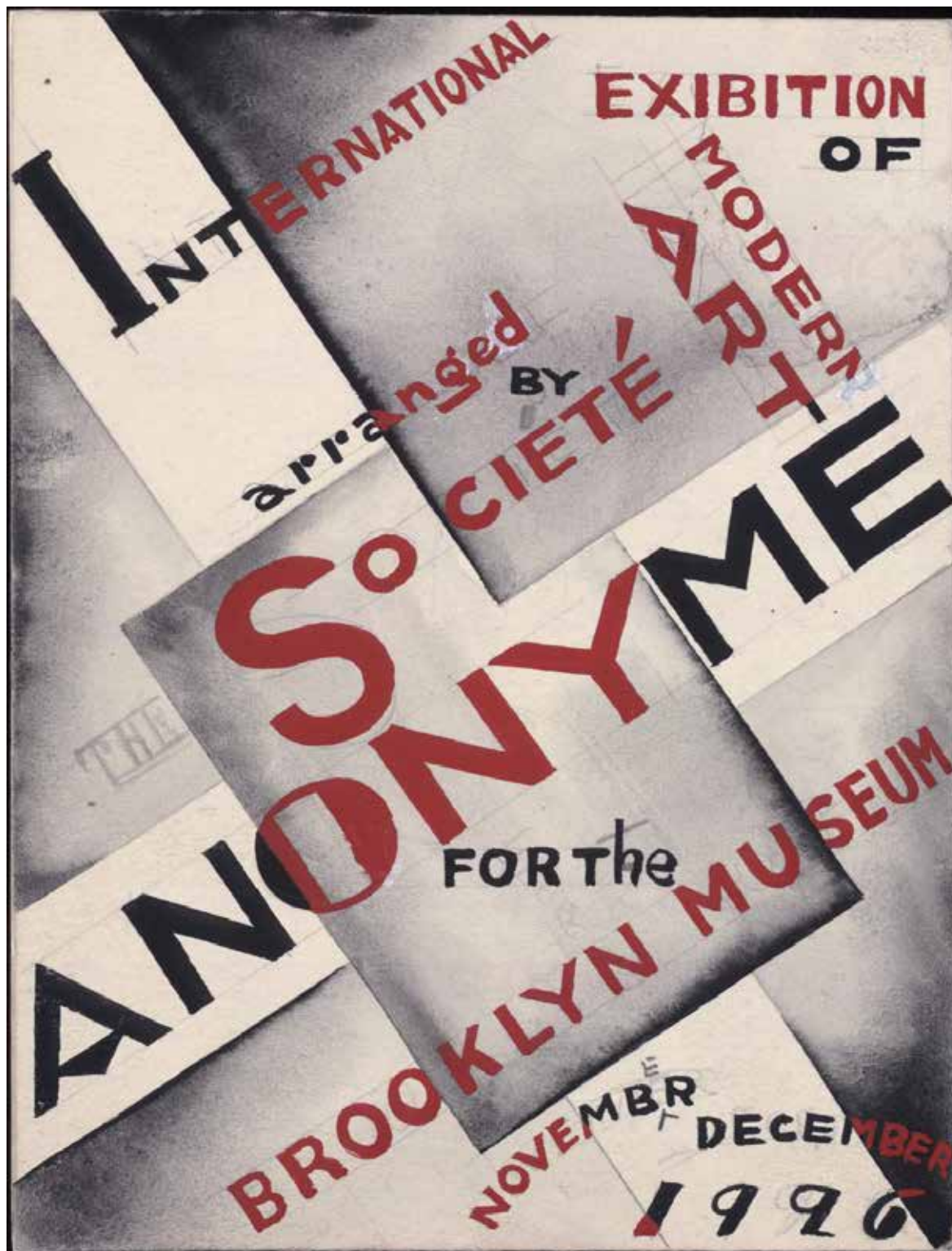


Figure 40  
International Exhibition of Modern Art (1926-1927: Brooklyn Museum) catalog cover,  
pencil and paint drawing  
Available at: <http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3520542>  
(Accessed 18 November 2016)

883

▲

**SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME, INC.**  
TEMPORARY ADDRESS, CARE OF MISS DREIER  
88 CENTRAL PARK WEST

NEW YORK

Hotel Bristol, Berlin, May 5th, 1926.

William Henry Fox, Esq.,  
Director, Brooklyn Museum,  
Eastern Parkway,  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

*To The Baulieu Trust Co.  
5 Place Vendôme - Paris.  
Sailing on the S.S. Rotterdam June 19*

My dear Mr. Fox:

In planning the detail of the big International Exhibition which I am arranging for you to open in November, I find that I must send the works chosen in various sections.

Under these circumstances it seems advisable to deliver each section, after it has cleared the customs, to the Brooklyn Museum, as your storage rooms are larger for assemblage than those at my disposal.

The first shipment is leaving Paris end of May and I am enclosing a copy of my letter of instructions to Mr. Dunn, so that you may know about it.

As soon as I get home the end of June I shall get in immediate touch with you to talk over the whole exhibition with you. I do not believe that any other museum or the complete floor of the Anderson Gallery will be able to take the whole exhibition and I am, therefore, going to ask whether it would be possible not to plan definitely for any other exhibition at your Museum until after I have had a talk with you. You spoke tentatively of having a water color show at that time, but will it not be possible to hold the whole thing in abeyance until I can talk over the details of the whole exhibition with you.

Not counting the Italians, nor any of the water colors or etchings, I have gathered together up to date approximately 140 paintings, representing 18 countries and 51 artists. The approximate representation is 2 paintings to an artist. Others of more importance or who are more unusual, I represent with 4 or 5, not including water colors or etchings.

As you know, Marcel Duchamp in Paris and Kandinsky in Germany have assisted me in this work, so that I feel sure you will be very happy at the result, as both these men have rare judgment.

With all best wishes, believe me,

Faithfully yours,

*Katherine S. Dreier*

Encl.

(MUSEUM OF MODERN ART)

Figure 41  
Dreier, 5 May 1926, Letter to W. Fox

*Blum*  
*Dreier*

❏

SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME, INC.  
TEMPORARY ADDRESS, CARE OF MISS DREIER  
88 CENTRAL PARK WEST

NEW YORK

Summer address:--West Redding, Conn., September 14th, 1926.  
Telegrams:--Danbury, Conn.

My dear Mr. Woodward:

My time was so short that I went away without going over the furniture which you and I were to select for the two rooms which we are using as a demonstration of how Modern Art looks in the home. But, perhaps, there is sufficient time for me to make this selection on Thursday, the 23rd, when next I will be at the Museum. As I shall be over early in the afternoon on Thursday, we will have plenty of time to do everything at leisure.

The more I think of making a selection of furniture which Abram & Straus will have for sale, the more pleased I am with the thought, especially as Abram & Straus is the big store where the big middle class Brooklynites buy.

By the way I had an amusing experience after I left you. A man representing a new paper called the "Brooklynite" dropped in at 237 Lafayette Street to get information about this big Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum and as I happened to be there I was able to give him all the information he desired. He hopes to write quite an article as advance news for their October issue. Do you happen to know the paper? He told me that it was about three months old and was to be for Brooklyn what the "New Yorker" is for New York.

I do hope that Mr. Moore would just ~~af~~leave lecture on the 21st. I wonder what the decision will be.

I am writing with this same mail to Mr. Conroy, asking him if it is not possible to have the inspector open up the cases which have arrived, even if we have no consular invoice, so that I may check off and really see what has arrived and know to whom to cable for these invoices. Maybe you will push the matter a little, so that the boxes will be unpacked and I can check them off when I arrive on the 23rd. I shall reach the Brooklyn Museum about half past one or a quarter of two.

Most cordially yours,

*Katherine S. Dreier*

Mr. Paul Woodward,  
Curator of Decorative Art,  
Brooklyn Museum,  
Eastern Parkway,  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

(MUSEUM OF MODERN ART)

Figure 42  
Dreier, 24 September 1926, Letter to Mr. Woodward



that the pieces were duty-free exempt. The officers were adamant that the shipment was not of works of art. The fact resulted in a legal battle in which Duchamp had to mobilize influential friends to have the works returned to him. In the end, Brancusi's exhibition was postponed until January 1927.

Duchamp's arrival to conduct the hanging was an event publicized by the Museum that advertised to the media that his presence was a key asset to the forthcoming exhibition, it is important to note that this is one of the documents that provides evidence of Duchamp's participation as curator, organising the exhibition:

October 18, 1926: Marcel Duchamp the celebrated French cubistic [sic] painter, will arrive on the S.S. 'La France' on Wednesday, October 20th. Among the matters to which M. Duchamp will devote his immediate attention will be the presentation of the forthcoming exhibition of Modern Art which is to open at the Brooklyn Museum on November 20th under the auspices of the Société Anonyme, an association which was organized by Duchamp and Miss Katherine Dreier, its President, in 1920 to establish in this country a place where the prophetic in art would always find a hearing. This exhibition will represent the work of artists from twenty-two countries and will be one of the largest of its sort since the celebrated 'Armory Show' of 1913 when Duchamp's famous 'Nude Descending a Staircase' was first shown to the American public. (Brooklyn Museum Press Releases, 1926c, no pagination)

The International Exhibition of Modern Art assembled by the Société Anonyme ran from 19 November 1926 to 10 January 1927, one week more than what had been planned initially due to the great public interest. By 26 December 1926 the show's attendance had already reached 48,000 visitors, an average of 1,500 people per day, according to data from the 1926 Press Releases available at the Brooklyn Museum Archives. (Records of the Department of Public Information. File 101. Press releases, 1916 – 1930). It featured artworks by names that had already participated in the S.A.'s activities, for instance: Villon, Brancusi, Man Ray, Picabia, Klee, Joseph Stella, Archipenko and Schwitters, and also other artists that became central figures of the 20th century art history: Naum Gabo, Max Ernst, Piet Mondrian, Fernand Léger, Joan Miró (who was exhibiting his art in a show in the USA for the first time), Giorgio de Chirico, László Moholy-Nagy, Georgia O'Keeffe, among many others (Yale University Art Gallery, 1950, p.210). As Wilson put it, 'Not only was the exhibition broad in its selection of artists, it also brought together works of extraordinary aesthetic diversity [...]' (Wilson,

2006, p. 75) it spanned almost all 'isms', artistic discoveries and movements' tendencies: Constructivists, non-geometric Abstractionism, Cubism, Expressionists, Dada, etc.

Dreier did not find the group assembled in Brooklyn discordant; rather, she believed the works shared a common philosophical agenda: to reveal, through colour and form, larger questions about the metaphysical state of humankind in the modern world' (Wilson, 2006, p. 75).

Wilson also explains that the main gallery was a large room, sectioned by fake wall divisions that 'while not extending the full height to the ceiling, configured the room in a conventional enfilade' (Wilson, 2006, p. 80), a linear arrangement of a series of interior spaces, with a vista down the whole length of the main corridor. The author also indicates that besides the formal galleries, Dreier also aggregated four smaller chambers described in a letter to Duchamp in July 1926, as 'four quaint small rooms...[which] will make a charming in time background for certain pictures and water colours' (Letter from Dreier to Duchamp, July 20, 1926 cited in Wilson, 2006, p.88).

As a matter of fact, Dreier, always coherent with the educational purposes that she genuinely appreciated, had the peculiar idea of also introducing, classical and regular furniture, mostly from a shop named Abraham & Straus which was the 'big store where the big middle class Brooklynites buy' as a 'demonstration of how Modern Art looks in the home.' (Dreier, K. Letter to Woodward, 14 September 1926, image of the letter: figure 42). Thus, in these small rooms she created domestic-like interior design: a Parlour, a Library, a Dining Room and a Bedroom (figure 43) (Baker, 2010). For example, five Schwitters' Merz collages were hung in the room representing a library. In the chamber that was supposedly a sitting room in a private house, the parlour, there was a version of Manet's Olympia by Jacques Villon. (Wilson, 2006).

Another attribute of the show – likewise the first exhibition of the S.A. – was the importance given to the frames. Dreier and Duchamp had asked the French bookbinder and designer Pierre Legrain (1889-1929) to compose 'modern frames as original and unique as the pictures themselves.' (Dreier, 13 April 1926, Letter to W. Fox, p. 2, figure 44 a and b). In the same letter, Dreier also underlined that Duchamp was responsible for ensuring that this special attribute really became reality. He was in charge of dealing with Legrain and decisively sup-



Figure 43  
International Exhibition of Modern Art (1926-1927). Brooklyn Museum. Installation view.

ported Legrain's weighty contribution to the show. Later, Dreier acknowledged this business in the catalogue by dedicating a note to the designer:

For years the problem of framing modern paintings has upset every modern artist. The result has been to abandon frames on the whole, but there are always certain circumstances under which a frame is necessary in order to isolate a picture from its surroundings. With this in view Pierre Legrain, the famous French book binder, whose exhibition of bindings met with such distinction when held at the Seligman Galleries in New York in 1925, has devoted his spare time to solving this problem and has met with the same distinguished success in many of his frames. (Dreier, 1926, p. 16)

These two singular experiments of the curators were considered complementary highlights that deserved attention. Another characteristic was the unique disposition of the artworks that gave leeway to a juxtaposition of different trends and artistic discourses. In contrast to the catalogue that was sectioned according to the countries represented in the International Exhibition, Dreier and Duchamp worked on the hanging without this nationalistic propensity. They also did not divide the artworks into artistic labels such as abstraction, geometric abstraction, or expressionism. The artworks were placed together destitute of

a chronological order or of a grouping by style or technique. The configuration abided by the idea of the exhibition being 'One Big Painting' (Dreier 1926 cited in Wilson, 2006, p 75), in which the whole composition of all the artworks gathered together would provide the viewer with a complete experience (to the viewer):

The hang promoted the sense that these diverse works were equal in importance, and brought to the foreground surprisingly resonant similarities in composition and palette. Speaking to a Brooklyn civic club in the museum galleries, Dreier reminded her audience that countries represented in the exhibition 'were shut off from each other's influence during the period of the terrible world war. Bearing this in mind, it is all the more amazing to see how united the underlying thought is and how united we fundamentally are.' Explaining her installation design, she continued, 'I have purposely, therefore, interchanged the nations in hanging to bring out this idea of the close unity that binds us.' (Wilson, 2006, p. 88)

According to Wilson the layout of the show also 'encouraged viewers to engage each individual work as a complex, philosophically resonant statement in its own right.' (Wilson, 2006, p. 88). The author reminds us that the artworks were placed 'ignoring some of the rules of symmetrical hanging', not leaving the same amount of space between them (depending on of each picture), which also allowed 'each to be contemplated separately'. (Wilson, 2006, p. 88).

The centrepiece of the exhibition was Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, or the *Large Glass*. It was the first and only time that the *Large Glass* was presented 'unfinished', in other words, without having a crack (figure 45). After seven long years (1915 to 1923) working on the piece composed basically of two glass panels, the artist decided that it would remain deliberately incomplete. According to Tomkins (2005) when someone asked Duchamp why he did not finish the artwork, he would answer in a very Duchampian manner, that he was bored with such a laborious technique and, consequently, lost the desire to keep working. Towards the end of his life, however, in an interview for the curator Katharine Kuh, in 1961, an old Duchamp offered a more intricate justification: 'It may be that subconsciously I never intended to finish it because the word 'finish' implies an acceptance of traditional methods and all the paraphernalia that accompany them.' (Kuh, 2000, p. 81). His last explanation and the potential effect of the unfinished artwork will be very meaningful for the analysis proposed here. For a better illustration of his position we quote Duchamp's biographer's opinion:

*Buffalo  
Toronto  
Cleveland  
Detroit  
Cincinnati  
Memphis*

**SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME, INC.**  
TEMPORARY ADDRESS, CARE OF MISS DREIER  
88 CENTRAL PARK WEST

883

NEW YORK

Paris, April 13th, 1926.

William Henry Fox, Esq.,  
Director, Brooklyn Museum,  
Eastern Parkway,  
Brooklyn, NY.

My dear Mr. Fox:

I have been so torn between wishing you were here in Paris to share the pleasure I have had the last two weeks in choosing the pictures for our big International Exhibition and glad to know that you were spared the hard work it involved, that at times I do not know which sentiment predominates.

I was amazed to find how scattered the artists live in Paris at present. Formerly it was so simple - either Boulevard Montparnasse and its surrounding streets - or Montmartre, where one found them. But now they seem to be everywhere, which meant that one had to definitely organize one's visits in order not to scatter one's forces in so short a space of time. I find I could easily have spent months here instead of just three weeks, but in spite of all I am very happy at my success and I think you will be delighted with what I am bringing over.

I am sure that you will be glad with me to hear that the chances are that in spite of the high standard I have determined on, besides the condition that the works chosen be imbued with the new spirit, I shall most likely have eighteen countries represented. This, I think, is quite an achievement. They are as follows:--America, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Spain, Italy, Roumania, Georgia, Switzerland, Russia and England.

It has been such a delight to me to find the beauty and vitality that I have found here and which I know I will also find elsewhere where I go - that has been a joy and an inspiration.

I came across a very remarkable painting by Jacques Villon, a Frenchman, which I wish the Brooklyn Museum would buy, for it would only cost you \$125.-- at the present rate of exchange.

The fact is I think we will be able to sell many paintings as the prices are going to be so modest - and it would indeed be a pleasure if we did so.

Another delightful experience which came my way was that I found that eminent French bookbinder, Legrain, whom Jacques Seligman was exhibiting this April and whose books have been asked for by Detroit and Cincinnati and, I believe, Chicago, is tremendously keen about the modern paintings. For very choice people he creates modern frames as original

(MUSEUM OF MODERN ART)

Figure 44a  
Dreier, 13 April 1926, Letter to W. Fox



and unique as the pictures themselves. Fortunately through Marcel Duchamp, who has been such a wonderful aid to me and alone has made it possible to accomplish what I set out to do in so short a space of time, Monsieur Legrain consented to make two frames for two pictures which I bought for the coming Exhibition. The Barbazanges Gallery is having at present a very remarkable exhibition of frames by him.

I am leaving next Monday for Germany, but I wanted you to get an account of what I had accomplished in Paris where I have collected approximately fifty-nine pictures, not counting water colors and lithographs, so that you would have some definite statement to ~~make~~ when speaking of this Exhibition at the Annual Meeting of the Museum Directors.

I am enclosing a copy of a letter which I wrote to Miss Evans who asked my advice about Diego Rivera. As you will notice I mentioned that perhaps you would be much interested in showing the sketches for these mural decorations at your Museum during the coming season. Arthur B. Davies bought several of his things in 1913 and I am under the impression that he liked his work very much - but you could easily verify this.

With warm greetings, believe me,

Faithfully yours,

*Katharine V. Dreier*

11.

Address G. Bankers Trust Co.

Place Vendôme Paris.

Mail for home on the S.S. Rotterdam June 19<sup>th</sup>

things to Mrs. Fry.

Figure 44b

Dreier, 13 April 1926, Letter to W. Fox



Figure 45  
Photograph of *Bride stripped bare by her bachelors* at the International Exhibition of Modern Art (1926-1927). Brooklyn Museum.  
Available at: <http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3525839>  
(Accessed 18 November 2016)

The need to escape from tradition, to make something that had never before been seen or thought of in the world, had been Duchamp's principal incentive ever since – with Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* fresh in his memory – he had isolated himself in a furnished room in Munich and made the first small drawing of a semi-abstract bride flanked by two mechanistically menacing bachelors. [...]“I was really trying to invent, instead of merely expressing myself,” Duchamp told Katharine Kuh. “I was never interested in looking at myself in an aesthetic mirror. My intention was always to get away from myself, though I knew perfectly well that I was using myself. Call it a little game between ‘I’ and ‘me.’” But in playing this little game, Duchamp may have tricked himself into a deeper form of self-expression. Just as the bride remains forever free and unpossessed, in that ecstatic delay before “the orgasm which may (might) bring about her fall,” the artist, by not finishing his masterpiece, remains free of its inevitable limitations. He also eludes the trap of art, in which every valid discovery takes its place, sooner or later, in the evolving fabric of tradition. Duchamp, at any rate, was content to leave *The Large Glass* as it was and to let the onlookers have the last word. (Tomkins, 2005, p.278 -279)

Going back to the history of the unbroken Large Glass, Duchamp finally presented his most complex artwork since the beginning of his peculiar path in arts at the Brooklyn Museum. After the show, it was unframed, deposited in a crate and remained there for years. Only in 1931, when Dreier decided to install it in her house in Connecticut, was the box opened and the Glass was found to have cracked from top to bottom. It was definitely finished said Duchamp years later when he went there to examine the damage. In 1936, Duchamp on another trip to New York during the North American Summer, restarted the painstaking job and restored the entire piece. After the repair, it was displayed to the public at the MoMA, New York – it stayed there on extended loan from September 1943 to April 1946, when it was returned to Dreier – and in 1953 it was finally housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art alongside other Duchamp's artworks where it still remains on permanent display.

Beyond the narratives that the long original title, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, suggests and the theories about genders and the relationship between man machine, the designation and strange functions of each element imagined by Duchamp such as the ‘Bridal’ protagonist and her domain (the

upper half of the glass) and the Bachelors' Apparatus (the lower panel) with the 'Nine Malic Molds', each of them with a 'job' such as the 'Delivery Boy' or the 'Policeman'; the 'capillary tubes' that connect them to the 'Chocolate Grinder' and the 'Oculist Witnesses'<sup>34</sup>, it is actually how it became well-known later, by its own simple and descriptive features 'Large' and 'Glass' that will be of major value to our curatorial investigation. Notwithstanding, it is important to revisit some of the aspects related to what has been written in terms of Duchamp's iconology.

Many considerations have already been elaborated regarding the complex machinery-like system sketched by Duchamp on the Glass. From the first text about the artwork written by Breton titled 'Lighthouse of the Bride' first published in an issue of *Minotaure*, in December 1934, to entire studies such as Octavio Paz's 'Marcel Duchamp el Castillo de la Pureza'<sup>35</sup> or many of Arturo Schwarz's essays such as 'The Alchemist Stripped Bare, in the Bachelor, Even'<sup>36</sup>, just to name a few, authors have spared no effort to decode the visual components created by Duchamp on the Glass. The launch of the *Green Box* in 1934 – with notes and drawings from 1912 to 1925, considered the genesis of the *Large Glass* – nurtured the interminable interpretations of these elements that established Duchamp's own iconology. For example, Breton offered a comprehensive description of the work lending weight to a humanization of the elements:

The Bride passes her commands to the bachelor machine through the three upper nets (draught pistons), these commands being supported and guided by the milky way' or in other fragment: 'It is worth noting that the chocolate grinder (whose bayonet serves as a support to the scissors), although occupying a relatively large portion of the Glass, seems designed principally to provide the bachelors with a positive identification by virtue of the basic adage of spontaneity: "the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself." (Breton, 1972, p. 94).

The art historian John Golding who wrote the book *Marcel Duchamp: The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* – aiming to, in his own words 'lead the reader out of a labyrinth in which it is anyway more stimulating to be lost' (Golding, 1973, p.13) – poses the following comment:

Breton described the *Large Glass* as "a mechanical and cynical interpretation of the phenomenon of love", and, as he suggests, the work is concerned with the attempts of the bride and her bachelors to con-

34 See figure 46 the diagram based on Duchamp's etching *The Large Glass Completed*, 1965.

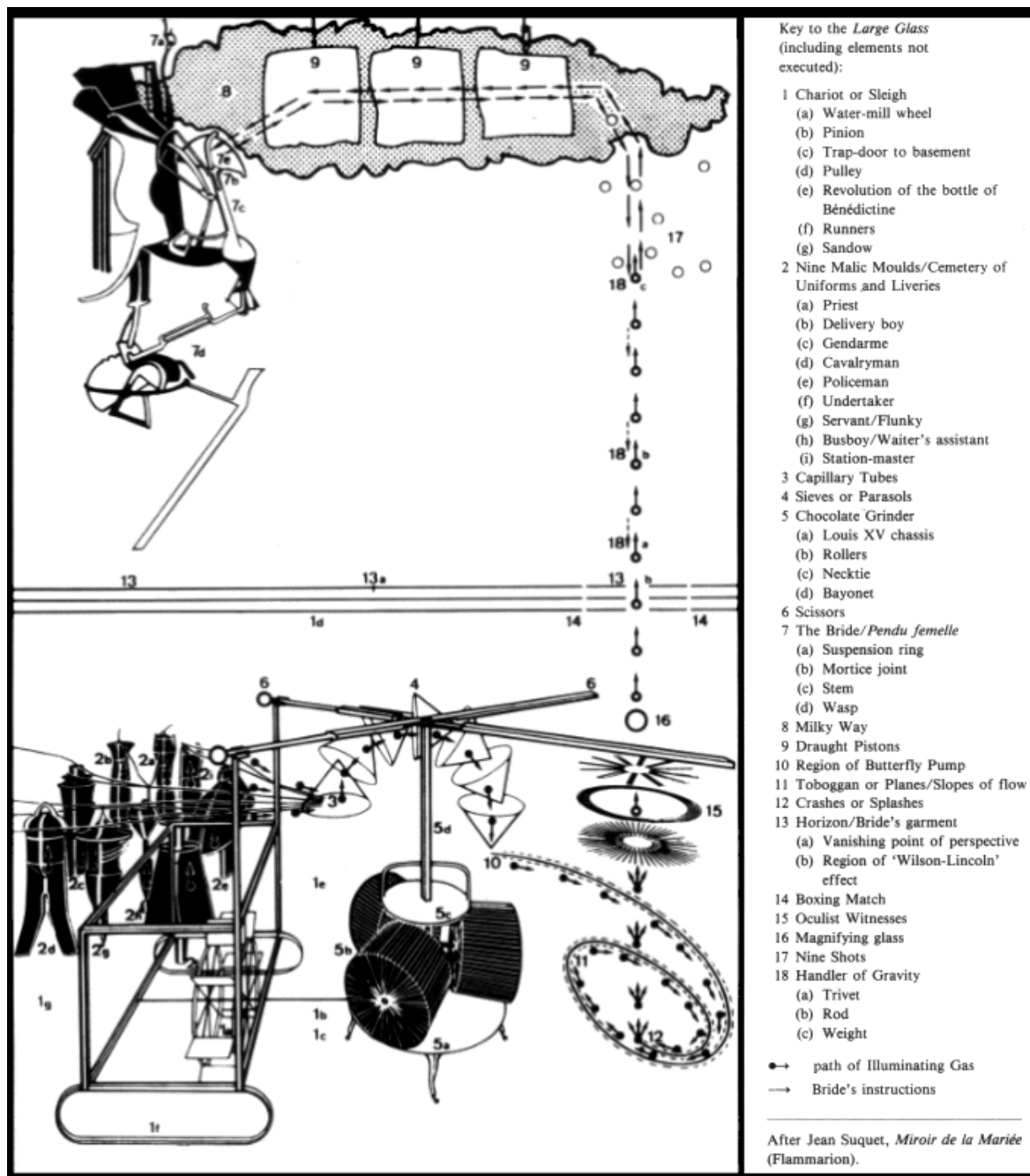


Figure 46  
Diagram based on Marcel Duchamp's etching *The Large Glass Completed*, 1965

summate the physical union which they both so desire (although the bride has odd hesitations) and which it will be seen, they both recognize themselves as incapable of achieving. But if Breton's essay has never been superseded as a sympathetic commentary on the *Large Glass* – only Octavio Paz's recent short text rivals it in its imaginative insights – this is because he was prepared to accept the fact that it was designed as an soluble enigma.' (Golding, 1973, p. 13).

Golding also studied the *Large Glass* in terms of symbols and began his essay explaining that the Bride is the compilation of all female bodies in Duchamp's iconology. According to Tomkins (2005), however, Arturo Schwarz is the author who has interpreted Duchamp's work beyond the most idiosyncratic scope. Duchamp's biographer accused Schwarz of being almost ridiculous in his interpretations that configured a kaleidoscope of Alchemy, Cabala, Freud, Plato, Greek Mythology, etc. Tomkins is even more radical against Schwarz's suggestion that involves Duchamp's subconscious desire for his sister. Such criticism led Schwarz in revised versions of *The Complete Works of Duchamp* (first published in 1969) – repeated and expanded in subsequent editions – to respond, saying that 'The incest theme is almost as old as society' and making clear that 'the sexual life of the Bride is merely "imaginative" just as coitus with the Bachelor is only "mental".' (Schwarz, 1997, p.ii). Despite Tomkins's opinion, the real criticism that can be fabricated in opposition to Schwarz is the lack of methodology and art history premises in his eccentric (though interesting to read) interpretation that resembles a fictional narrative. Duchamp actually regarded all these readings with his habitual sense of humour. Tomkins explains that the artist never agreed or disagreed with any of the ingenuous theories laid upon his oeuvre. According to Tomkins, for Duchamp all of them merely reflected the personality of their authors (Tomkins, 2005, p. 143)<sup>37</sup>.

All these appraisals could be of extreme significance to the discussion of Duchamp's oeuvre, but sometimes they are embedded in misleading imaginativeness. Here these narratives will not be examined at length. As pointed out by Naumann in the essay *Precise and Not so Controlled, the Large Glass and Related*

37 Among many other books and essays about the *Large Glass*, it is also worth mentioning Steefel (1977), which scrutinised all the elements of the *Large Glass* in this book and other articles. Particularly in the referenced book, Steefel drew attention to the 'satire and irony' which Duchamp offers to 're-evaluate experience' and provided excellent insights on the material used by Duchamp and its relation to the gaze and the fourth dimension. Nevertheless, later in his study he also turned to find archetypes and gave an erotic interpretation to the transparency of the glass.

Works on Glass (2012), much has been published about the *Large Glass* but less attention has been given to the material with which the young Duchamp chose to experiment when he tried new approaches to painting. Hence, we shall investigate the fact of the glass being elected as the material that contains meta-meanings and Duchamp's preference for working with a large dimension against any feasibility evaluation.

Measuring 2.77 m tall and 1.75 m wide, the *Large Glass* combines the balance of a very delicate media and its huge proportion. It was not a very practical surface to be used as an art piece, that throughout its history travelled with its maker. Duchamp's masterpiece was not of a transportable size, but even knowing that it would be displaced, Duchamp did not abandon the idea of using Glass<sup>38</sup>. The massive double glass panels, bought when the artist first went to New York in 1915, were assembled in a fashion that makes them stand like as an oversized window, open to other views.

Moreover, as aforesaid, the wanderer Duchamp was in Munich, Germany in 1912 – on his first trip taking time out for himself in another country – when he started to think about the *Large Glass*. There he painted two oils on canvas: *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* (July–August 1912, figure 47) and *Bride* (August 1912, figure 48) – both considered, as far as movement is concerned, a step further on the *Nude Descending a Staircase* as well as being a clear combination of mechanical-like systems with human organisms –, the drawing *Aeroplane* and the first study named *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* (Cabanne, 1997, p.70). In addition to that, from this period in Munich, Duchamp wrote and drew notes that posteriorly were included in the *Green Box*.

In the essay *Resonances of Duchamp's Visit to Munich*, Thierry de Duve (1991) analyses what he considers a moment ignored by Duchamp's biographers. The author explains that the reason for that was the lack of information about what the artist had done during this trip, that Duchamp later said was the occasion of his complete liberation. For Cabanne, Duchamp also described Munich as the place where: 'I defined the general outline of a large-scale work which was to occupy me for a long time on account of the many new technical problems that had to be resolved.' (Cabanne, 1997, p.74). Brilliantly, Duve recov-

38 No parity for instance with artworks which creation he would engage later in this life such as the 1914 mobile readymade, *Sculpture for Traveling* an installation of torn rubber bathing caps, cut up and glued together, that he carried from New York to Buenos Aires, or the suitcases containing miniaturized reproductions of his oeuvre *La boîte-en-valise* (1935-1960) made several years later. See T. J Demos' *The exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (2007) for an extensive studied about Duchamp's mobile artworks.





Figure 47  
*The passage from virgin to bride*  
Duchamp, M. (1912)  
Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79044?locale=en>  
(Accessed 18 November 2016)  
Oil on canvas  
59.4 x 54 cm





Figure 48

*Bride*

Duchamp, M. (1912)

Available at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51474.html?mulR=827861800|1>

(Accessed 18 November 2016)

Oil on canvas

89.5 x 55.6 cm

ered what the 25-year-old Duchamp must have seen and experienced during his self-exile in Germany. His veracious hypothesis is that the desertion of French artistic milieu and the contact with the functionalism movement emergent in Germany provided Duchamp with the conditions to stir up the ideas to create what a few years later he would baptize as readymade:

The readymade reveals precisely what functionalism denies: the function of the name. Duchamp chooses an industrial product, displaces it, puts it to another purpose, whereby it loses all its utilitarian dimension as well as all ergonomic adjustment of its form, but by the same act, gains a function of pure symbol. And this symbol alone is the link which bears within it, from a tradition which it acknowledges as dead, the anticipated value of a culture which strives to become. (Kuenzli, R. & Naumann, 1996, p.58)<sup>39</sup>.

After Munich, in 1913 Duchamp assembled the *Bicycle Wheel*, retrospectively considered the first readymade. However, for certain it was not only the readymade that had its inception in Munich. As we have been examining, Duchamp also concretized the plan for the *Large Glass in Munich*, which can also be seen as a metonymy for his strategy of exhibition making. To put more emphasis on the choice for glass made in his period in Germany, Naumann argued that Duchamp might have been in contact with the Bavarian tradition of reverse glass painting: *Hinterglassmalerei*. Notwithstanding, this is a hypothesis that cannot be proved. Ades, Cox & Hopkins (1999) also relate the Bavarian tradition as source of inspiration to Duchamp. It is worth remembering that none of Duchamp's first works on glass were made during his trip to Germany but in the following months, they are: *Glider Containing a Water Mill in Neighbouring Metals* (1913-1915) and *9 Malic Moulds* (1914).

However, if one assumes the *Hinterglassmalerei* as a germinal source of inspiration to Duchamp, this construal can open a horizon of interpretation. Naumann (1996) also reminds us that it was not customary for well-educated visual artists to work with glass, as far as is known it was a medium reserved to 'minor' artisans. But, if the young Duchamp who had already contested the primacy of retinal paintings had been bewitched by the Germanic folk art craft and

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39 Duve shapes his theory having as 'pictorial fact' *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* and the drawing *Airplane*. The essay is the fifth chapter of Duve's book *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* (1991) but a better English version is in Kuenzli & Naumann *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* (1996).

consequently decided to experiment with glass, one can say that it was not the pictorial quality that caught his attention, but the manner in which it was used, highlighting the evident quality of the support material: its transparency.

Differing from traditional painting, with the glass Duchamp would not have had a consistent basic plane, which we understand here as the physical support for any visual construction. Following Kandinsky's definition: 'The term "Basic Plane" is understood to mean the material plane whose concept is called upon to receive the content of the work of art.' (Kandinsky, 1947, p.113). According to Cabanne (1997) Duchamp not only read Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* as soon as he arrived in Munich but also wrote many notes on his copy of the book.

Duchamp would not be dealing with the space of a canvas that must be filled. The background is not something conclusive, but on the glass, it is a translucent substance that makes the environment visible through from behind. It means that his *Large Glass* embraces the context in which it is placed. Naumann provides quotes from Duchamp to endorse this analysis:

It is perhaps for this reason that he insisted on referring to the entire project as a "delay in glass". As he later explained: "It was the poetic aspect of the words that I liked... It was to avoid saying, 'a glass painting', 'a glass drawing', 'a thing drawn on glass'." In fact, for him the decision to paint on glass was purely practical, for it avoided dealing with a background. A number of Duchamp's Cubists colleagues faced this same problem, and many tried to solve it by painting on circular and ovoid canvases. Using glass, Duchamp's solution was more expedient and definitive. "The main point is the subject, the figure," he said. "With the glass you can concentrate on the figure you want and you can change the background if you want by moving the glass". Moreover, the results delighted him. "The transparency of the glass," he noted, "plays for you". [...] "Every image in the glass is there for a purpose and nothing is put in to fill a blank space or to please the eye. I used glass because there are no preconceptions about it. If a painter leaves canvas blank, he still exposes to the viewer something that is considered an object in itself. This is not true of glass, the blank parts, except in relation to the room and the viewer, are not dwelt upon." (Naumann, 2012, p. 31)

Why is the transparency of the *Large Glass* so important? Because it can be taken as confirmation that Duchamp was not interested in isolating elements within the arts. This was not the case in relation to his own artistic practice or those of other artists, neither was that his intention when during a much earlier stage of exhibition making he wanted to implement a specific way of curatorial thinking. His notion of art as an open entity replete with meanings that can be filled by the viewer is nowadays a well-known fact in art history, as discussed in chapter one. However, only in 1957 did Duchamp clearly address this in the lecture *Creative Act*, when he stated that the artist and the spectator are the most important factors in the creation of art:

All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. This becomes even more obvious when posterity gives a final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists. (Duchamp, 2005, p. 519)

This statement laid the foundations for contemporary art practice, that in terms of this study we consider post-Duchampian art. Beyond this fact, his discernment of what art can be and what art can provoke also transverse the manner in which Duchamp articulated the exhibitions that he, as primary curator, gradually elaborated. In this sense, the transparency of the glass appears here as a feature that allows the artworks to conjugate the same conversation within a unique presentation. It was a way of giving to each artwork a variety of voices, its own presentation to the world in addition to the projection of other art manifestations in its vicinity, as well as the context where they are presented. This process can undoubtedly lead to an accumulation of narratives that the artwork can sustain and subsequently project into the world with a louder voice. What we can call the dialogue between the artworks causes a better comprehension of what the artistic project is of each of the artworks reunited in a show. Or, in order to use a Duchampian term, it brings a deeper understanding of the 'art co-efficient' which is the 'the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state'. (Duchamp, 2005, p. 518)

This is the core of Duchamp's art practice in which the artwork changes its nature only by means of a context displacement, as has been seen with his readymades, but by taking this idea a step further, the *Large Glass* magnifies this concept by actually bringing the context into the 'painting'. The transparency

of the glass seizes everything inside the otherwise stable basic pictorial plane. In a very tangible approach, Duchamp materialized his ideas regarding the context and the work of art in which no meanings are definitely created in a singular and unique artistic manifestation, by choosing a simple material, something 'doomed' to artisans' usage, in this case Bavarian *Hinterglassmaler*.

Once again, Duchamp disregarded the current opinion in the art world to instead make away for the unexpected and absorb the subtle experiences of the world in which he lives. Furthermore, if Naumann (2012) speculatively associates the *Hinterglassmalerei* with the genesis of the Large Glass, we could also hypothetically (and playfully) include another relevant feature of the old regional German craftsmanship, with the aim of better grasping the ideas behind the Large Glass as a metonymy for Duchamp's curatorial practice. In German Gothic architecture there is the prevalence of stained-glass windows with old figurative icons or abstract patterns. These colourful glass panes are constitutive elements of a building's structure that under the effect of natural light and its natural movement, illuminate the inner space of any large construction, like medieval churches. The maximum example of this skill on glass would be the Cologne Cathedral whose more than forty windows extend over an area of circa 10,000 m<sup>2</sup>. In Munich, it can be found in churches, like the *Cathedral of Our Dear Lady* and in other important secular buildings. However, we can guess that this technique was indeed not a novelty for those who lived in Paris, where there is the Saint-Chapelle, a medieval chapel abounding with stained glass. The difference would be the magnitude of the constructions in Germany and the actual style of the mosaic figures, which appear on the glass. Regardless of the religious connotation that the example of churches can impart (particularly taking into consideration the socio-psychological interpretations of the bride or the virgin, part of Duchamp's iconology) what is important to highlight is that through the glass, the light that enters the medieval church creates a distinguished ambiance.

Due to the movement of the light across the colourful glass, the space inside the building turns out to be a propitious space for a ritual. Again, here we think of a ritual stripped bare or devoid of traditional or religious implications, but consisting of an action beyond the ordinary. The reflection of the glass brings about a desired space, filled by the light that shines in from outside. The glass allows the light from the outside to be considered a central component of the whole structure, as once it penetrates the building it permits the place to gain

life. It conveys the illusion that the air is moving, the colours are changing and the figures are alive. The transparency of the glass windows ignites the space for something out of the extraordinary to happen, amalgamates each unit inside as a single entity while in the meantime producing a real correlation between what is inside and what is outside. It was not by chance that Duchamp said to Cabanne: 'The Glass saved me by virtue of its transparency'. (1971, p.18). The light spectrum comprises everything inside the space and its correspondence between two contexts is an analogy directly connected to the manner in which Duchamp understood the set for an exhibition display.

As far as windows are conceptually concerned, Schwarz wrote that Duchamp 'would have liked, on this occasion, to have been thought of as a *fenêtrier*', meaning not a window-maker but rather a person 'concerned with the possible developments that a window might undergo' (Schwarz, 1997, p.205). Following this statement, authors have been conjugating the series of works by Duchamp that explicitly play with (*Fresh Widow*) or formally resemble (*Large Glass*) this basic architectural element that frames the connection or the passage from one place to another<sup>40</sup>. David Antin in the essay *Duchamp: The Meal and the Remainder* scrutinized this undeniable connotation in Duchamp's oeuvre:

Probing a wall, if you have a drill of a particular hardness and size, there may be any number of potential openings that you may make; but there are some places in the wall your drill will not be able to penetrate. This is an urgent consideration for a window-maker (a *fenêtrier*), which Duchamp admitted to being. What is it to make a window? It is to couple two distinct spaces in a limited way. It allows "vision" to pass through, but a window isn't a door. It is a little alarming and at best somewhat foolish to go through a window. A door would "communicate" between rooms, while a window restricts the relation between the two spaces. It creates an ambiguous relation between them, which is why glass is an excellent medium for a window, since it is quite permeable to vision and inconvenient for the passage of bodies. [...] But

40 Moreover, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen Museum in Düsseldorf, Germany, dedicated, in 2012, an entire exhibition to the theme titled *Fresh widow: the window in art since Matisse and Duchamp*, with a homonym catalogue. In the foreword of the book Marion Ackermann writes: 'The start of the twentieth century is marked by a departure from the outlook. The window in art is no longer linked to the yearning motif it was for the Romantics. The protagonists no longer look off into the distance; his or her glance is repelled by the reflecting window and cast back to the place from whence it came. This condition has never been realized more distinctly than in Marcel Duchamp's *Fresh Widow*, a work in which he recreated a French window that he then covered with black leather. It is the associated operation, the performative act itself, that becomes the decisive message: the window has been closed once and for all in modern art.' (2012, p.11)

neither reading is the “real” meaning, because there is no “real” meaning, because a “real” meaning suggests opening a door from one space into another and going through, that is to say, leaving one room for another. [...] Again, the role of the window-maker was quite precise. It was even more precise than this, because a window allows vision continuous vacillation between the related but separated spaces, so that both separated sides of the window pane remain in the mind. (Antin, 2011, pp.142–144)

Dalia Judovitz in *Drawing on Art: Duchamp and Company* writes that the neologism ‘windower’ expresses Duchamp’s desire and concern to ‘explore the conceptual potential of windows not as their manual maker but as their intellectual maker’ (Judovitz, 2010, p.27). Gerhard Graulich in *Fresh Widow as a paradigm: Marcel Duchamp’s transformation of the concept of the picture*, like Judovitz, explains this analogy affirming that Duchamp ‘integrates the intellectual concept of the work into the work itself’ (Graulich, 2011, p.82). In his essay, the author says that ‘To a certain degree analogous and parallel, yet nevertheless as an antipode, Duchamp’s *Large Glass* comes into being in counterpoint to *Fresh Widow* [...]’ (Graulich, 2011, p.81). Graulich harks back to the Renaissance’s notion of the picture as *finestra aperta*<sup>41</sup> to explain that by his use of windows, ‘Duchamp formulates a new concept of the picture in which imagination no longer explicates in advance but – in the sense of an “open work” – must be constituted by the observer himself.’ (Graulich, 2011, p.83). Ades, Cox & Hopkins (1999) fasten together these analogies and subjoin the following comment: ‘Glass has the property of a window in that it automatically and involuntarily includes what is seen through it, but unlike a window the position of the *Large Glass* can be changed to look out onto a different prospect, a different setting for the figures.’ (Ades, Cox & Hopkins, 1999, p.94).

Hence, along with the explanatory hypothesis disclosed by the *Large Glass* – the window inference that transforms the two glass panels into a passageway or its transparency that allows it to grip everything in its surroundings within its own negative ‘pictorial’ plan – the central factor to be carried forth into discussion is its singularity as an unfinished or an open artwork and the fact that it changes the environment since it is not a stable element set on dis-

41 Leon Battista Alberti in the 1435 treatise *De Pictura* proposes the notion of the painting as a *Finestra aperta* or open window: ‘First of all, on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen.’ (Müller-Schareck, 2012, p.21).

play. Everything changes depending on the location of the Glass. Besides being Duchamp's incomplete masterpiece to be filled by the 'spectator' it is also an artistic manifestation, which once on display, repels being closed upon itself. The *Large Glass* in an exhibition gallery disrupts any attempt to compartmentalize the artworks. It provokes the notion of grouping and makes the elements in an exhibition space be seen as a single entity. Glass, transparency and window open to multiple perspectives. Following these interpretations, the *Large Glass* become an index indicating the strategy behind Duchamp's considerations of exhibition making. The transparency and the hovering meanings that float in the nature of an artwork made of glass lead us to think about a literal and conceptual open window that the *Large Glass* constituted in its first and only display as an unfinished work.

Dreier, as Duchamp's main curatorial partner, wrote a study about this subject in 1944, years before Duchamp gave the lecture that would become *The Creative Act* text. As already seen, she was a sincere admirer of Duchamp and probably was the one who closely perceived Duchamp's strategies towards curating and exhibition making<sup>42</sup>. In *An Analytical Reflection on Duchamp's Glass* written by Dreier and the Chilean Surrealist Roberto Matta Echaurren, they amalgamated some of the aspects of the *Large Glass* that consolidates its multiple facets as an incomplete or open artwork. Dreier, who more than anyone else lived the saga of the broken glass, understood the reason, or the point at which Duchamp left his long-enduring masterpiece unfinished, and left it up to chance' to finish it for him. Dreier, Duchamp's curator partner and the only curator who exhibited the 'unfinished' *Large Glass*, in her text about the piece also touches upon an extremely important topic to understand the artistic project of the *Large Glass* metonymy of Duchamp's structure of thinking when leading with exhibitions that, in this thesis guides the analyses of the curatorial practice of the post-Duchampian art. For this reason we will read here a full extract of this crucial note with the original underline left in the manuscript by Dreier and Echaurren<sup>43</sup>:

The essential principles of human consciousness cannot be grasped unless we abandon the psychological attitude of conceiving the im-

42 A public example of how Dreier cherished their friendship, and the praise and respect that she had for Duchamp as an art thinker was the inscription in her 1923 book *Western Art New Era: An Introduction to Modern Art*. She addressed the study to him. Using his nickname 'Dee' she wrote: 'To Dee this book is dedicated in recognition of the generosity of his spirit and his inspiration to modern artists.'

43 The source for this quote is located in the manuscript found in Beinecke's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Dreier published the text as a S.A. publication, in 1944. The facsimile is available online in this website: [www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue\\_4/collections/glass/popup\\_2.html](http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_4/collections/glass/popup_2.html)



age as a petrified thing or object, the result of emphasizing the exterior perception. The image is not a thing – it is an act which must be completed by the spectator. In order to be fully conscious of the phenomenon which the image describes, we ourselves have first of all to fulfil this dynamic act of perception. Marcel Duchamp is the first to paint the image per se, to be completed by an act of consciousness on the part of the spectator. Prior to this the artist spoke and the onlooker listened for he was not called upon to complete the work of art by his own conscious set. It was a statement – now it is a dialogue! In Duchamp's most important work: La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires memes: (Machine Agricole) – we do not find any bride nor agricultural machine, but a disturbing plastic conversation. This, the human spirit can only understand by means of poetic reasoning, which demands an intentional conscious act on our part. Through this poetic reasoning, the spirit per se realizes the reality of the object in place of only recognizing it. It is the first attempt to bring to consciousness the image of the essence –which is the essential image of the object. This cannot be completed except through the conscious participation of the onlooker. Painting – glass – mirror – these are the three substances in dynamic interrelation to the final image of the Glass. While we gaze upon the bride – there appears through the glass the image of the room wherein we stand and on the radiating design of the mirror lives the image of our own bodies. This dynamic reality, at once reflecting, enveloping and penetrating the observer, when grasped by the intentional act of consciousness is the essence of a spiritual experience. To put our creative forces into action is the most important goal which the art of the present day can achieve. The spectator is no longer an onlooker – he is an actual participant. It must however be recognized that the liberation from outworn modes of experience comes in proportion to the intensity of the set of consciousness and the sensitivity of the onlooker. (Dreier and Echaurren, 1944, pp.13-14)

Therefore, we finally reach the point at which the necessary analysis of Duchamp's work in the International Exhibition of Modern Art assembled by the Société Anonyme will tie in with the previous line of argumentation, in order to unveil the full complexity of Duchamp's move. First of all, it is important

to once more remark that Bohan (1982) recalls that it is undeniable that it was Duchamp himself who was in charge of the installation of the *Large Glass*.

*To Be Looked at, With One Eye, Close To, For Almost An Hour* (1918) was another piece by him in the show, but the attention bestowed on the most celebrated work will be the topic here. *To Be Looked at* was his third work on glass. Duchamp made it during the nine-month period that he lived in Buenos Aires. Dreier, the owner of the piece, did not appreciate the title – which was a playful allusion to Da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting* – and renamed it *Disturbed Balance*. Donald Shambroom (2000) in the essay *Leonardo's Optics Through the Eyes of Duchamp: A Note on the Small Glass* gives an insightful look at the relationship between this particular work and the influence of Da Vinci's precepts on Duchamp and his cubist brothers and colleagues from the Puteaux group.

Following Bohan's study and description, it extended over the two largest galleries and it was also Duchamp who was in charge of personally selecting the 'others which hung behind it and merged with its clear translucent surface when viewed from the opposite side.' (Bohan, 1982, p.56). Duchamp coordinated the labour of the Brooklyn Museum staff members who built the wooden frame that made it possible for the two panels to be 'erect and free-standing' (Bohan, 1982, p.56). The photos of this specific part of the exhibition (figures 45 and 49) reveal that it was installed in a diagonal vector to the walls, it was not parallel to the paintings, nor did it have a symmetrical distance to the other artworks. It was placed in the middle of the room, similarly to the position of a door half open.

On this occasion, therefore, the *Large Glass* is positioned to incorporate in addition to the qualities of being a 'window' the attributes of a door, and it is unavoidable not to see in this interpretation the genesis of other works posteriorly envisaged by Duchamp. Besides being a 'window-maker', he would during the subsequent years also play with all meanings carried by the concept and the structure of a door, in artworks such as *Gradiva Door* (1937), a glass door containing a human silhouette at the entrance to Breton's gallery or the ultimate installation *Etant donnés* (1946-1966). However the first example was created immediately following the S.A. Brooklyn exhibition. As soon as he was back in Europe, in February 1927, Duchamp moved into 11 Rue Larrey studio in Paris. There he added a new architectural element to his apartment, a corner door installed to serve at the same time two adjacent rooms. 'I showed it to some friends and commented that the proverb "A door must be either opened or closed" was thus caught in flagrante

delicto for inexactitude' (Duchamp cited in Schwarz, 2001, p.497). According to D'Harnoncourt & McShine (1989), the conventional wooden door was removed in 1963 and shown as an art piece titled *Door:11 rue Larrey* (1927).

Duchamp had selected three sculptures to be nearby, *Leda* (1920) by Brancusi (figure 50) – the marble piece, on a round concrete base, whose minimal contours evoke the metamorphosis of a woman becoming a swan – and two of Gabo's small sculptures, and Bohan also claimed that 'the *Large Glass* dwarfed the many conventionally-scaled works around it' (Bohan, 1982, p.56). Bohan's last opinion may have posteriorly changed. In her 2006 essay *Joseph Stella and The "Conjunction of WORLDS"* she suggests a slightly different reading. While shedding light on the very active participation of the modernist painter in the S.A., the theorist analyses the position of Stella's work on display in relation to Duchamp's *Glass*, and her interpretation is much closer to the connections already made here than in her 1982 inference that the *Glass* made the other works appear smaller. Stella's painting in question was the dark coloured oil on canvas *Brooklyn Bridge* (1918-20) occupying a wall next to the *Large Glass* at a 45-degree angle.

In this setting Stella's painting becomes a foil for Duchamp's glass. It contributes an element of revelation that disrupts the secular thematics of the glass, and it confirms Duchamp's conviction that "the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act". (Bohan, 2006, p. 29-30)

Stella's fascination with the urban landscape was well known as was also his high esteem for the Futurist movement from Italy, the artist's native nation, and these two features drove him to create a unique representation of a monument of engineering. The motion-like image preserves the vibration of the means of transportation that used to cross the Brooklyn Bridge and its structure is painted almost as a crystal whose progressive sides extend in a geometrical manner. Stella drew the wires that suspended the bridge as grids that transpose the view of the viaduct in perspective. The bridge is there but also unfolds itself in an 'in-between space' on canvas being literally and conceptually a connection in the middle of two points. Clearly, the transparency that absorbs the environment was also an issue for Stella. As a curator, Duchamp by choosing to position the painting in a diagonal vector to the *Large Glass* made both art coefficients even more visible in the exhibition space.

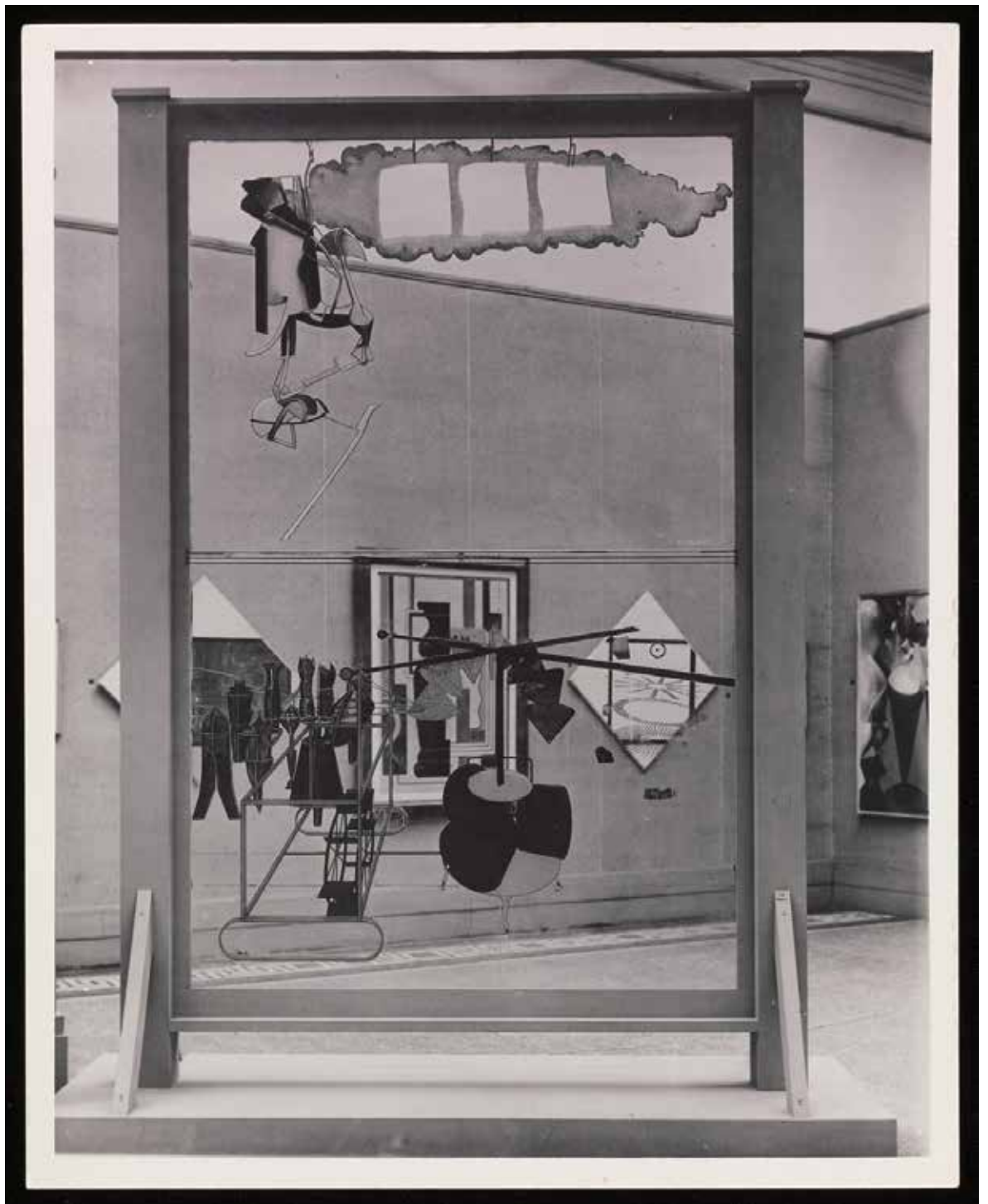


Figure 49

Photograph of Marcel Duchamp's *Bride stripped bare by her bachelors* at International Exhibition of Modern Art

Available at: <http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3526613>

(Accessed 18 November 2016)



Figure 50

*Leda*

Brâncuși, C. (1920).

Available at: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/79382>

(Accessed 18 November 2016)

Marble on concrete base

Marble: 22 x 26 x 8 ½ in.; Circular base: 26 x 48 in. (diameter)

In a photo of the International Exhibition in which the *Large Glass* is in the centre, one can get a glimpse of what the public's experience was like in the Brooklyn Museum. If someone stood in front of the work, that visitor, spectator or viewer would see, at the height of the Bachelor Apparatus, two lozenge-shaped paintings on both fringes and a painting by Fernand Léger in the middle. The diamond-shaped painting on the right was a work by Mondrian who had tried to escape from the traditional format by rotating a square canvas. In the search of the pure form, the black grid that became his trademark appeared here drawing an open square in the pictorial space. Juxtaposed to this 'fighting for the simplification and purification' – as stated in the exhibition's catalogue (Dreier, 1926, p.54) – usual to the De Stijl movement, of which Mondrian was one of the founders, Duchamp imprinted his not at all simple, *Oculist Witnesses*, the radial and circle lines based on diagrams were used to test people's eyesight.

On the left side, there was another painting by the emergent Dutch artist César Domela (1900-1992), a pupil of Mondrian who, in the example on display at the Brooklyn show, was clearly mimicking the style of his mentor. Gazing through the *Large Glass*, one could see some of the nine *Malic Moulds* by Duchamp invading and messing up the suggestive square Domela painted. Both examples of the De Stijl group that Duchamp strategically placed behind the *Glass*, dealt with the notion of a non-terminated image. Taking advantage of De Stijl's economical and non-narrative approach, Mondrian and Domela offered artistic manifestations that were an open process in which the viewer was impelled to complete the painting while looking at it. In this case, Duchamp's curatorial choice can be seen as a playful gesture in which he threw other elements into the process. In other photos of the show, it is also possible to identify in the *Glass*' vicinity a painting by the Hungarian Vilmos Huszár (1884-1960), another member of the De Stijl movement.

Occupying a central position, among the paintings on view within the glass plane, there was *Composition No. VII* (1925, figure 51) by Léger. It may be relevant to recall that Duchamp had known Léger since the period of the Puteaux Group, as the painter was one of the regular colleagues during the discussion meetings that aimed to develop Cubism towards a different direction from what was taught by Braque and Picasso. In Puteaux, their practices were 'less hermetic' and 'more sensuous'. (Cabanne, 1997, p.38). Between 1910 and 1911, Raymond Duchamp-Villon requested an 'unusual commission' from the younger Duchamp and some of his friends in the group, including the already

well-established Léger. He asked them to create new pieces for him to hang in his new kitchen (Cabanne, 1997, p.50). For the occasion Duchamp drew *Coffee Mill* (1911, figure 52), which in his own description 'shows the different facets of the coffee grinding operation, and the handle on top is seen simultaneously in several positions as it revolves.' (Duchamp cited in D'Harnoncourt and McShine, 1989, p.256.). Duchampian theorists such as Cabanne, Ades, Cox & Hopkins, D'Harnoncourt and McShine agree that this was the first work created by him that expressed his interest in mechanical subjects. They also concur with the fact that *Coffee Mill* anticipated the motto of and was the primordial study for the later creation of *Chocolate Grinder*, which had two versions as paintings in 1913 and 1914, and then was repeated in the *Large Glass*' composition.

The introduction of dry engineering techniques and diagrammatic forms to avant-garde painting, albeit here [*Coffee Mill*] in a casual and almost private context, later had, [...], far-reaching consequences.' (Ades, Cox & Hopkins, 1999, p.45).

For Léger the result of inserting mechanical elements into his creation was the emphasis on the man-machine relationship, which made his paintings detached from the style proposed by other Cubists. His oeuvre has an intelligent use of colours. Léger used to compose his pictorial spaces trying to understand what a machine's preciseness would involve. Léger's painting carries an *Interieurs Mecanique* – term used by Dreier in the International Exhibition catalogue – it means that they each have their own internal mechanism for being built. He was not interested in only representing the machine but in composing his paintings using a mechanical method. *Composition No. VII* oil on canvas mounted on aluminium is a notorious example of his practice, and it was not by chance that Duchamp chose it to be right behind his transparent piece: the *Chocolate Grinder*'s motor, part of the *Glass*, could provide the energy to ignite Léger's organic mechanical image. Even without knowing the personal background history that situates the two artists side by side, the unifying factor for the pieces being together is that both works mesh together as a single gear. Part of Duchamp's apparatus and Léger's *Interieurs Mecaniques* concatenated from the public's point of view. These latter analyses serve here as an exemplary model of what Duchamp's strategy was as an exhibition maker. By providing these readings, the aim is to offer some of the connections and symbolic constellations that Duchamp sought to arrange as a meaningful display for the public, so that the public itself would create its own understanding. To continue this examination,



Figure 51  
Composition No. VII  
Léger, F. (1925).  
Available at: <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/33949>  
(Accessed 18 November 2016)  
Oil on canvas  
132.72 x 91.92 cm





Figure 52

Coffee Mill

Duchamp, M. (1911)

Available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-coffee-mill-t03253>

(Accessed 18 November 2016)

Oil paint and graphite on board

33 x 12.7 cm

we shall examine a brief summary of the last activities of the S.A, and the undeniable protagonist position that Duchamp had in perpetuating the S.A.'s legacy in order to verify other examples of this overlooked but relevant function that he performed. Next, this study demonstrates that Duchamp's curatorial practice embraced other activities beyond exhibition-making.

As briefly mentioned before, the Société Anonyme operated for thirty years. In the years subsequent to the International Exhibition its activities were less frequent and never again gained the public attention that it had in its first decade. It continued sponsoring educational lectures and lending artworks to exhibitions in the U.S. and in a few cases abroad, although by then the S.A. used Dreier's apartment in New York as its official address. Nonetheless, they considerably diminished any attempt to put together an exhibition assembled by the S.A. It is interesting to note, though, that the collection that officially started with a donation in 1923<sup>44</sup>, did not stop growing until the end of the S.A. As Gross (2006) emphasizes, Duchamp and Dreier reformed the organization's main goal in the 1930s to establish a permanent collection.

Much as Dreier and Duchamp had shared the decisions in the exhibition program, they shared the task of selecting works for the Collection. Dreier took the lead with suggestions, cajoling Duchamp to take an interest in Piet Mondrian, for example, who she has convinced was a significant artist. But Duchamp consistently edited the final selections. (Gross, 2006, p.12)

Then, Gross quoted a letter from April 1936 from Dreier to Duchamp asking his opinion about the purchase of other paintings that were used in former S.A.'s exhibitions. The letter 'typifies their exchanges around the securing of artworks' (Gross, 2006, p.12). And Duchamp's answer brings to light his decisive role in the collection: 'You can use the Miro, Picabia and Ernst as if they belonged to the S.A., I will fix it with them when I return.' (Duchamp cited in Gross, 2006, p.13). In 1941, they donated the collection to Yale University. From the following year onwards, a selection of works has been on permanent display in the Art Gallery and other buildings on the university's campus. The donation to another institution did not stop Dreier and Duchamp from working on the collection, the agreement with Yale allowed the artworks to travel whenever S.A. participated

44 The American Painter John R. Covert (1882–1960) decided to have a precocious retirement from the Arts and offered four of his best paintings to the S.A.

in other exhibitions and they continued to add pieces to the collection. For instance, until the end of the Second World War they directed their efforts to helping artists who were struggling with the conflict, selling and buying artworks to support them (Gross, 2006).

In 1950, Dreier and Duchamp officially dissolved the Société Anonyme with a dinner in celebration of the three decades of activities and with the launch of the definitive catalogue written by the two founding members that since the donation to Yale, had been adding the artist's names, revising and editing the book. About the catalogue, Cabanne years later asked Duchamp if it was not a very banal work for him to do 'It wasn't your kind of job' (Cabanne, 1971, p. 84), the interviewer said. Duchamp answered in a polite manner that also made explicit his flexibility to incorporate other roles and tasks. In this case as a historian, he also placed importance on the relation between art and the public or 'observer':

Katherine Dreier wanted to do a completely traditional work, one that would shock no one, on her collection, which was full of interesting pieces. She came to me and I couldn't refuse. I attached much more importance to it than it had. At that moment I changed my profession; I became a historian. I didn't do so well, but I tried not to be too stupid, which unfortunately I was sometimes. I made some puns. For Picasso, I said that the public of any period needs a star whether it be Einstein in physics, or Picasso in painting. It's a characteristic of the public, of the observer (Duchamp cited in Cabanne 1971, p.84).

This event also marked when the Société Anonyme finally found a home<sup>45</sup>. After the dissolution, the entire collection was permanently transferred to the Yale University in 1950. At the end it comprised 616 artworks – including oils on canvas, watercolours, sculptures, etchings, woodcuts and even commercial designs dating from 1909 to 1950 – by 172 artists from 23 countries.

Two years later, in 1952, Dreier died at the age of 75. In her will she designated Duchamp as her main executor and left him in charge of distributing her bequest according to her plans. He intended to keep Dreier's private collection together. In a letter to Henri-Pierre Roché, on 07 May 1952 (Naumann & Obalk, 2000), he confidentially told his friend that he was negotiating one or two rooms with the Phillips Memorial Washington to house the majority. Duchamp wrote:

45 Dreier tried to turn her house into a museum for the S.A.'s collection and her private collection to reside together. In 1936, she hired an architect to draw the first plan but by 1941, with the global conflict and eventual lack of sponsors, she had already understood that her idea would not succeed.

‘I would prefer this solution to everything being scattered all over the place.’ (Naumann & Obalk, 2000, p. 315). The exception would be the *Large Glass*, which Dreier had agreed beforehand would be together with Louise and Walter Arensberg’s collection<sup>46</sup> that Duchamp was arranging to go to the Philadelphia Museum. Nonetheless, the number of works in the collection was not small. In the Memorial Exhibition of Katherine Dreier’s Private Collection, which Duchamp organized in homage to his friend in December 1952 at the Yale University Art Gallery, he listed 76 artworks in the catalogue, but for instance, the *Large Glass* was not included in these records. From that show, he selected some of her pieces to be left at Yale together with the former S.A.’s collection. By the end of the year, he was already aware that it would be impossible to maintain Dreier’s collection in a single institution. ‘To those who already know her great accomplishments in the Société Anonyme, this private collection will make still clearer her infallible taste for unusual artistic expression’ (Duchamp in Yale University Art Gallery, 1952). This statement reveals that differently from the S.A.’s collection, in her private collection Dreier invested in or helped every artist she liked, without demanding from it the consistency of aesthetic principles that the S.A.’s collection possessed. Thus, Duchamp eventually placed the artworks in different mu-

46 Louise (1879-1953) and Walter Arensberg (1878-1954) were rich art collectors and patrons and their home was often a place where the New Yorker art scene would reunite in the 1910s. They met Duchamp just after he arrived in New York in June 1915 and they ‘fostered’ this new artist friend of theirs. Duchamp even moved to a studio in the same building where the Arensbergs lived for a while. The friendship between them that lasted until their deaths has already gave rise to a vast bibliography as for example Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Silent Guard’: A Critical Study of Louise and Walter Arensberg, 1994 Ph.D. thesis by Naomi Helen Sawelson-Gorse for the University of California. Here, it is relevant to mention Duchamp’s role as the Arensberg’s collection consultant and later as organizer of the space where their collection would permanently dwell. Nevertheless, to develop our study about Duchamp as a curator, we would rather pay more attention to the group exhibitions that he set up in other contexts. It is important to remark that reading through the correspondence between Duchamp and the Arensbergs, the meticulous care that Duchamp took to find a place where the collection would be better displayed was striking. He was detail-oriented in sending drawings of the rooms in the museum and plans of how the artworks would be placed to the patrons. It is also crucial to note that the Arensbergs had the most representative collection of Duchamp’s oeuvre. For instance, they owned *Nude Descending a Staircase*, and because Duchamp was aware of the significance of the *Large Glass*, it was a logical move to attempt to have this piece together with the Arensberg’s collection. To demonstrate his commitment to the Arensberg’s collection, we quote an extract of Naumann & Obalk’s biographical note about them: ‘Duchamp often provided the Arensbergs with advice on their growing collection of modern art, and after they moved to California in 1921 (and he returned to Paris in 1923), he would frequently act as their European liaison in locating and acquiring important paintings and sculptures for their collection. Eventually, the Arensbergs would amass the single largest and most comprehensive collection of Duchamp’s work, which, along with their entire collection of modern art (including nearly 200 pieces of Pre-Columbian Art they assembled while living in California), they gave to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Duchamp not only served as the Arensbergs’ principal representative in the delicate negotiations that took place in arranging for the terms of this gift, but after Louise Arensberg’s death in 1953, followed two months later by her husband’s, Duchamp oversaw the installation of their collection in the galleries of the Philadelphia Museum, where the Arensberg Collection remains on display to this very day.’ (2000, p. 50) More about the relationship between Duchamp and the Arensbergs in the next chapter.

seums. He had to conjure up a comprehensible manner to group the artworks in order to make them an irrefutable offer to notable institutions. And he did so. Besides the Phillips Memorial Washington (nowadays the Phillips Collection) and Yale, some pieces went, for example, to the Museum of Modern Art New York, and he donated 28 artworks (among those were Brancusi, Archipenko, Calder and Schwitters) to the Guggenheim Foundation also in New York. Having summed up this epilogue of the partnership between Duchamp and Dreier, we can see that at least five institutions which recognisably have important 20<sup>th</sup> century art collections, conserve, to a certain degree, Duchamp's gesture as curator, as part of the acquisitions were selected by him.

At this point of our study, we have offered evidence that Duchamp was working as a curator. Yet, in order to be even more precise, it is paramount to understand his achievements in that domain. First of all, as many authors have affirmed, Duchamp's abandonment of art making was already a fact in the public sphere by the time of the 1926 International Exhibition. Bohan, in her analyses of the critical response to the exhibition, quoted a not very enthusiastic review titled *International Exhibition is One-Sided* published in *New York World*, in December 1926, that blames the 'artists' that assisted in the organization of the show for its 'datedness'. The critic (Bohan did not cite the name) wrote that 'Duchamp was no longer associated with the modern movement' and Kandinsky was 'always a vague theorist' (Bohan, 1982, p.103). Bohan justifies the opinion of the critic reminding us that Duchamp's last painting was *Tu m'* (1918) – the large panel commissioned by Dreier, in which he in an illusionistic manner represented the readymades bicycle wheel, corkscrew and hat rack, and was on display in the private context of Dreier's house – and that 'His activities since that time were not widely known and the number of completed projects extremely limited' (Bohan, 1982, p.231). It is indeed true to say that since before the S.A.'s inaugural show, Duchamp was drastically less interested in making art.

Hence, at a deeper level lies the fact that even with a literature that insists on claiming the Société Anonyme as 'An Artists' Museum' (which is the title of Gross' opening essay on *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*) they were not exactly an artists' organization. The only one of the founders that was mainly an artist, Man Ray, had abandoned his responsibilities early enough not to have his name strongly associated with the S.A.'s legacy. Despite her experiments in drawing and painting, Dreier as an artist was, in most cases, appreciated among her circle of friends. Perhaps, because great artists always surrounded

her, she did not find room to create an oeuvre bearing originality. Consequently, her foremost contribution during her crusade on behalf of Modernism was as a curator, patron, writer and educator. Regarding Kandinsky, whose support to the S.A. was fundamental, history proved that the person who said that he was a 'vague theorist' was completely wrong. Kandinsky is considered one of the major art theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His writings were translated into many languages and his educational ideas, have perhaps almost a global repercussion. He was undeniably a unique artist with a singular practice, but it is also right to say that he had a very analytical mind that went beyond the artistic practice and reached other spheres. Kandinsky, as an educator and writer, more than for being an artist was and still is influential in art and design schools around the world. Therefore, his involvement with the S.A. where he undertook the vice-president's position was geared much more towards an educational engagement, the desire to promote new talents rather than promoting his own artistic achievements.

Returning to Duchamp, as D'Harnoncourt & McShine (1989) had been emphasizing ever since he left the *Large Glass* definitely unfinished in 1923, his 'passion for chess' occupied most of his time for the next decade and the public was under the impression that Duchamp had 'ceased to produce art' (p.18). He would create few works from this period so on. He spent 1924 working on a single piece *Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)* (figure 53), a motorized sculpture that spins a disk with a spiral drawing, that he finished with the help of an engineer in 1925. The piece was commissioned by the collector Jacques Doucet of whom he asked that it would not be shown in public. It was the second machine from a series of studies about optical effects, the first was *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)* (1920, figure 54). This series would culminate in short movie *Anémic Cinéma* (1926, figure 55) but he would only touch these experiments again in 1935 with *Rotoreliefs (Optical Disks)*. Even his admirer, André Breton, would in the 1930 *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* criticize him 'for abandoning art for chess.' (Breton, 1972, p.19). To the general public it appeared that he spent a whole decade working on nothing but the reproductions that would be launched in the *Green Box* (1934).

Nowadays when Duchamp's silence is relatively comprehended due to the contributions from a large number of Duchampian researchers, it is not far-fetched to suggest that his commitment to art perhaps could also be understood as being of another nature, which is not in the realm of the art practice but in the curating. By the time Duchamp let his peers think that he had retired from the arts to dedicate himself to playing chess (or just breathing) he was in a pub-



Figure 53

*Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)*

Duchamp, M. (1925)

Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81432?locale=en>

(Accessed 18 November 2016)

Painted papier-mâché demisphere fitted on velvet-covered disk, copper collar with plexiglass dome, motor, pulley, and metal stand.

148.6 x 64.2 x 60.9 cm



Figure 54  
Rotary Glass Plates (*Precision Optics*)  
Duchamp, M. (1920)  
Available at: <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/43792>  
(Accessed 18 November 2016)  
Painted glass, iron, electric motor, and mixed media.  
165.7 x 157.6 x 96.5 cm



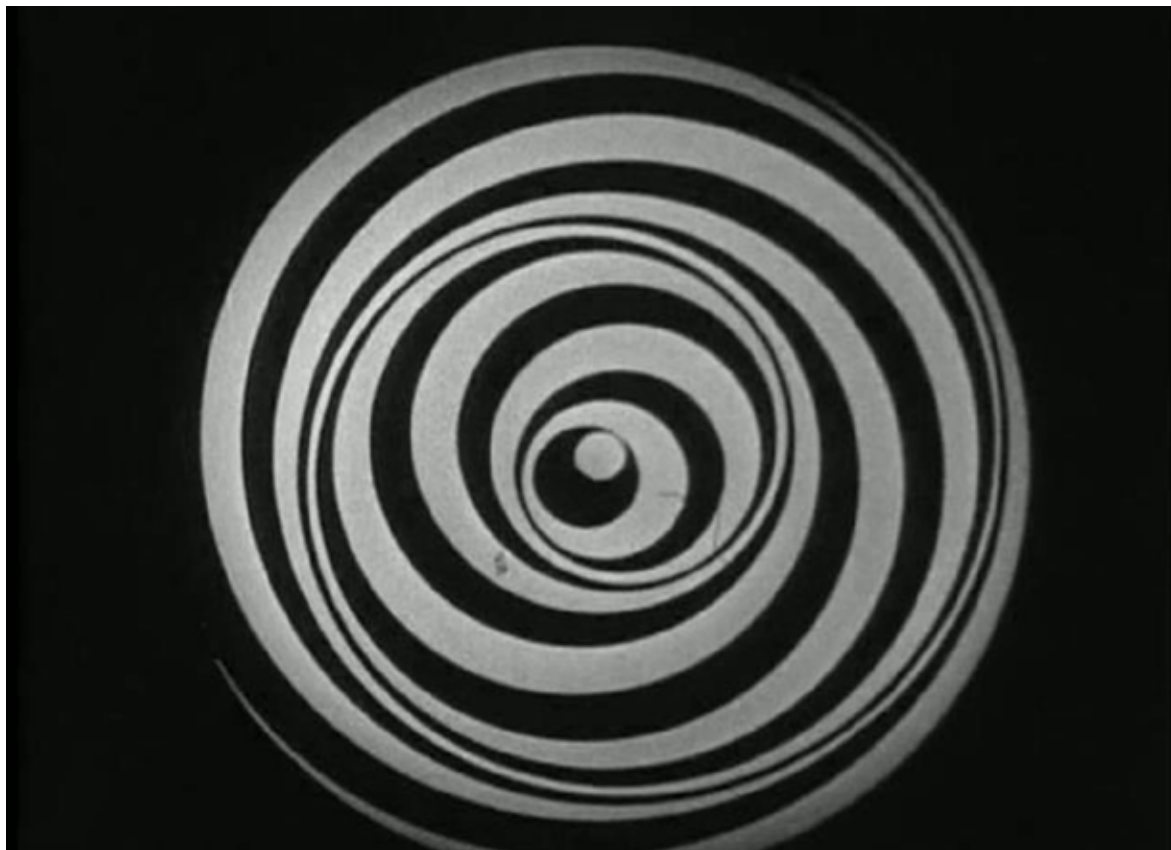


Figure 55  
Still from *Anémic Cinéma*  
Duchamp, M. (1926)

lic sphere organizing, selecting, arranging and putting exhibitions on display. Otherwise he was working on publications such as books or catalogues. Not surprisingly, Breton, who criticized him, was a well-known witness of Duchamp's efforts as a curator, as we will see further in the next part of this chapter.

In actual fact, when talking about the Société Anonyme, as already mentioned here, Duchamp said: 'what was needed was to bring over paintings that permitted a confrontation of values... a comprehensive state of mind regarding contemporary art.' (Duchamp, 1946 cited in Gross, 2006, p. 7). We repeat this quote after scrutinizing his role in the S.A., to shed light on our main hypothesis. Having understood his function, one can see that he expressed these words from the position of a curator, and it is indeed a curatorial statement. One can perceive that Duchamp adopted – without stating, specifying or having a definitive status – a curatorial position, in the same way that he said he had stopped making art, but in fact continued making it, without wanting to be called an artist. He succeeded in establishing the occupation of curator such as we understand it today. He did it without a job in a museum, without belonging to a movement nor the willingness to build his own narrative and then impose it on the public.

To briefly characterise Duchamp's curatorial practice: He was much more in the position of those who 'take care' of art, create an environment where art can be articulated, in which the artistic coefficient is properly exposed to and interconnected with the public. This is, as we have seen in multiple examples, what he tried to build with the Société Anonyme.

## **2.3 MODERN ART IN NEW YORK - RELATIONS AND TENSIONS BETWEEN THE SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME AND MOMA**

A shift of such magnitude does not happen overnight, in particular when it concerns a new artistic thinking and how to make it communicate with the world. In order to illustrate what the historical context was, it would be prudent to draw a concise comparison to another institution and a curator who inscribed his achievements in art history. As Gross (2006) reminds us, S.A.'s desire to continue its activities, even after its peak, was an attempt to consolidate a broader concept of Modern Art than what had been embellished by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (1902-1981). Barr was the curator who established MoMA, the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929, which was a sore point for Dreier. She never took it well that both hers and Duchamp's efforts to create a Museum of Modern Art long before anyone else were not acknowledged by those responsible for MoMA, especially by its first director, her colleague Barr.

Another reason for the relative anonymity of the Société Anonyme is acknowledge in letters to Dreier from artists such as Stella and John Storrs, who believed that the organization had been overshadowed by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in receiving recognition for the establishment of modern art in America [...]. Dreier and Duchamp shared a disregard for Barr's curatorial activities but acknowledge the Modern's growing importance. [...] It is clear, though, that Barr reciprocated Dreier's negative opinion, considering her a confounding and competitive presence in the art community, particularly, because Duchamp remained so close to her and so supportive of her ideals. (Gross, 2006, p.4)

Gross observed that Dreier and Barr had 'courted each other for the benefits they could receive through mutual pleasantries' (Gross, 2006, p.4). Nevertheless other authors identified a certain empathy between them. For example, Kantor (2002) in his study about Barr's academic formation, who different from Dreier had an education in art history and not as an artist, endorses that he

visited 1923 Kandinsky's exhibition at the Société Anonyme gallery and learnt about the Russian artists through S.A. publications. Barr had also visited the 1926 Brooklyn International Exhibition and from this visit initiated an affable correspondence with Dreier in search of collaboration. Later, Barr met personally with her and asked her for the catalogue of the Brooklyn Exhibition, as a donation to the Wellesley College, where he had recently been hired and in the next year would initiate the first Modern Art course in the U.S (Kantor, 2002). Dreier's reply was enthusiastic:

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the work you are doing and if in any way I can assist you...though of course our funds are not great. But we have the material and if the expense of traveling could be met we could always help out' (Dreier to Barr, February 4, 1927, cited in Kantor, 2002, p. 114)

The young art historian, not yet a curator, had asked for Dreier's assistance to approach the photographer and gallery owner Stieglitz in order to have support in preparing his first exhibition. In the follow up to the conversation, Barr asked to borrow artworks but failed miserably due to asking about artists who were not part of the S.A.'s collection or that Dreier thought were not related to modern art.

I would never include a Dix in any exhibition I arranged so you could never get it through me. Carra's pictures never reached us because his pictures were held for duty in Paris in connection with a prior exhibition. As for Schrimpf, he belongs absolutely to the theater world, unless it were an exhibition including the modern theater, he also would not be included. Besides I know of no Dix, Carra or Schrimpf in this country, do you? I could include an early Malevich and a Mense which were exhibited at Sesqui-centennial. You seem to forget that Kandinsky and Klee are much more important than Moholy-Nagy at the Bauhaus. M-N is still of 2nd rank compared to Kandinsky and Klee who are of the first rank. All 3 are at the Bauhaus. (Dreier do Barr, March 4, 1927, cited in Kantor, 2002, p.115)

As pointed out by Kantor, 'Barr learned a great deal from Dreier because she had had the benefit in 1922 of meeting the artists at the Bauhaus and at a large exhibition of Russian artists in Berlin.' (Kantor, 2002, p.117) She knew how to maintain close friendships with the artists and she regularly correspond-

ed with the ones in Europe. 'Dreier reinforced some of Barr's views,' affirmed his biographer (2002, p.117). But, apparently, Dreier's patience with the 25 years old prodigy from Princeton University who had not yet travelled the world or visited modernist's studios in Europe did not last. Barr disappointed again and did not get funds for the show, and the proposed exhibition never happened. Few months subsequent to this exchange of letters, Barr, whose reputation in the art circle was gaining importance, received an invitation to write a cultural quiz regarding Modern Art in *Vanity Fair* a journal publication which at that time was considered 'a source of Modernism', as indicated by Kantor (2002). In his questionnaire, Barr listed creative people and in the answers to the multiple-choice questions he provided succinct descriptions of who was who in the Modern art world. In the question about which people were the 'pioneering spirits' of modernism in America, he listed Stieglitz, the gallery owner whose attention he wanted. However, Dreier, Duchamp and the S.A. slipped Barr's mind. It was the first of a series of indelicacies towards the Société Anonyme's innovative accomplishments that Barr committed, something that he would try to fix later on in his life when he became a more experienced art historian and curator, the director of the Museum of Modern Art.

Another of Barr's biographers, Alice G. Marquis, author of the 1989 *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern* was not indulgent when writing about Dreier and Barr's relationship. In her book, when relating the 1920s and the 1930s New York art scene, she did not acknowledge the endeavours that had been made by the S.A. hitherto. In fact, the words used to describe Dreier were not pleasant: 'She was a cantankerous, elderly maiden lady, an unlikely art connoisseur who happened to own one of the world's most eclectic collections of early modern art.' (Marquis, 1989, p.257).

Marquis (1989) with a tacit metaphor regarding church donors, talking about how Barr's father, a Presbyterian minister raised funding from the congregation, hinted that Barr flattered Dreier solely to obtain favours. On the other hand, Marquis provided clues as to whether Barr usurped or not the title firstly envisaged by Dreier:

He must have known that the Société Anonyme also was called the Museum of Modern Art, because that was printed at the bottom of her letterhead. And he may have had some guilt about appropriating this name when the MOMA was found in 1929; at least he kept these three early letters from her in his private desk file, apart from later corre-

spondence with Dreier. Some years after Dreier's death, Barr was still rationalizing his museum's appropriation of her collection's name. In a memo for this files, he claimed that during the summer of 1929, when the MOMA was getting organized, no one recalled the *Société Anonyme's* other name, nor was it listed as such in the Art Index. When the MOMA organizers learned that "Miss Dreier felt badly about our using the name," Goodyear or Barr himself had written her to apologize or explain. Goodyear insisted that Dreier's use of Museum of Modern Art "was not known to our founders... When it was called to our attention it was too late to make a change." Barr may have forgotten about the name Dreier had given her collection but not about what it contained. He carefully avoided antagonizing her in any way. In 1930, he refused to review her book, *Western Art and the New Era*, for the *Saturday Review of Literature*. It is "a very muddled book," he wrote, but "as Dreier is a friend of mine and an important collector in modern paintings, I do not feel that I could give an opinion about it." (Marquis, 1989, p.258)

In the case of Duchamp, however, most of the writers agree that it was not a friendly relationship, at least in the beginning. In a letter to Walter Pach from 17 October 1934, in a tone rarely found in Duchamp's writings, he penned a clear message of his disapproval to the curator. Duchamp was absolutely honest about his dislike of Barr. He gave his friend Pach, the same advice he had told to Arensberg: do not lend anything to Barr. Duchamp didn't trust him and would say:

[...] plus his feelings of animosity towards me (in particular) – coming out as little tantrums – made me realize how small minded he is. [...] I think an open argument would only increase support for him, and the critic's only weapon is silence. [...] I will simply take it upon myself to tell people exactly what Barr is like if they ask me what I think of him. And if this does not appear to affect him, I am sure his own malicious incompetence will backfire on him in the not too distant future. He is not worth a cent. He's a student and it would pay the people who pay him to know that or to find out. (Naumann & Obalk's, 2000, p.193)

Akin to Dreier and Duchamp, Barr was in charge of securing works and curating exhibitions for MoMA. But unlike them, Barr did not have the same freedom they had in the *Société Anonyme*. He was obliged to negotiate

with MoMA's powerful museum board and his diplomacy towards its members ceased in 1943 when he had a fight with its chairman and was dismissed. Some authors, including Tomkins (2005), say that Barr refused to leave MoMA and was given a small room in the library to write. He occupied that space until 1947 when he submitted his book *Picasso: Fifty Years of Art* as the Doctorate thesis that he had left unfinished decades before. Harvard University awarded him, under unusual circumstances, with the PhD title (Marquis, 1989). After this achievement, he was nominated MoMA's Director of Collections and could return to his old office. He retired in 1967. However, other sources, such as Kantor (2002) and Marquis (1989) deny the 'popular fable' that Barr was neglected in a dusty corner of the library during 1943 to 1947. Nonetheless, both emphasised that he was fired for a lack of administration skills and his procrastination to complete tasks mandatory to his position, as for example, the edition of books.

Before his dismissal, Barr had already tried hard to gain Duchamp's trust. Notwithstanding Duchamp's 'embargo' asking the collectors not to lend his artworks to the 'arrogant gentleman'<sup>47</sup>, the MoMA's director managed to bring some works for a few shows there. In 1936, Barr included *Nude Descending a Staircase* and five other works by Duchamp in his landmark exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* (March to April) and at the end of the same year in *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (from December 1936 to January 1937) Duchamp was celebrated with eleven artworks in total in the exhibition's first two display rooms. Not only by exhibiting but also acquiring, Barr gradually tried to change Duchamp's hostility against him. In 1938, for example, Barr secured *Anémic Cinéma* for the Film Library<sup>48</sup>. Little by little, Barr was making Duchamp a cherished figure in MoMA. In 1942, Barr personally helped Duchamp with a delicate issue. Arensberg asked Barr to pull some strings with the government for Duchamp to attain the US Visa and be able to settle in the country.

In addition to these efforts, Tomkins (2005) affirms that it was precisely when Barr lost his position that he became closer to Duchamp who had forgotten his bitterness against him. Their differences vanished over a chessboard. When Barr was in a sort of limbo with no designated position at MoMA and probably

47 Duchamp wrote to Dreier on 15 December 1934: 'I had asked Levy and Pach not to lend anything of mine to Mr. Barr. So you did right. But do you remember my telling you about the arrogance of the gentlemen and you know that my only attitude is silence.' (Naumann and Obalk, 2000, p.194).

48 The Film Library was the 'apple of Barr's eyes' a department found in 1935. It had been long battle for Barr, who for years, since almost MoMA's inauguration, had been trying to convince the founding trustees the importance of film production for the Modern Art. It is the first department of its kind in a museum. (Marquis, 1989)

with more free time, they were seen together playing chess. It is worth noting that it was only when Barr was removed from his position at MoMA that the Large Glass was housed there, on temporary loan from 1943 to 1946. During this period it was exhibited at the MoMA's 15th anniversary exhibition: *Art in Progress* (from May to October 1944). It was at MoMA that the Large Glass was photographed for *Vogue* magazine's cover (July 1945, figure 56) special issue about Duchamp. It is one of the rare photographic records of the Large Glass in the museum.

Despite these personal affairs that serve to elucidate their antagonism, what is more important here is the dissimilitude found in the two distinct curatorial styles. Barr's reading of Modern Art significantly diverged from Dreier and Duchamp. The different approach towards curatorship was also presumably one of the sources of this lack of kindness between them. While the Société Anonyme's curatorial approach attempted to spread the idea of Modernism as a movement without boundaries which envisages a new artistic thinking that would be a 'universal' development; Barr segregated each of the styles, as if they each had a cause and effect, in a very didactic manner. Kantor would compare the two ways of thinking as follows:

But whereas Dreier was motivated by the sense that art's universal appeal was embedded in its social and spiritual message – ideas she drew from the writings of Ruskin and Morris, from theosophy, and from the spiritualism of Kandinsky – Barr's predilections were neither so romantic nor based on such spiritual notions. She was dedicated to show each radicalism in its purity; in contrast, Barr's method was to synthesize the overall view and demonstrate by comparison. (Kantor, 2002, p.117)

Barr's background was very divergent from Dreier's and even more so from Duchamp's, who had basically learnt art in praxis, through contact with artists, visiting and organising exhibitions. Art was part of their lives and to live was art. It was not something impalpable or distant. Barr, on the other hand, had a brilliant education first at Princeton, where he enrolled at the age of 16, then at Harvard where he had his first real contact with the art world. In the USA, the discipline art history was originally taught in both these schools. There the young Barr learnt about high art (salon paintings, marble sculpture) and low art (crafts and artefacts), how to develop a trained eye for connoisseurship and how to elaborate a visual memory. In Harvard the art history education was more explicitly ingrained with a formalist approach which would be its main methodology:



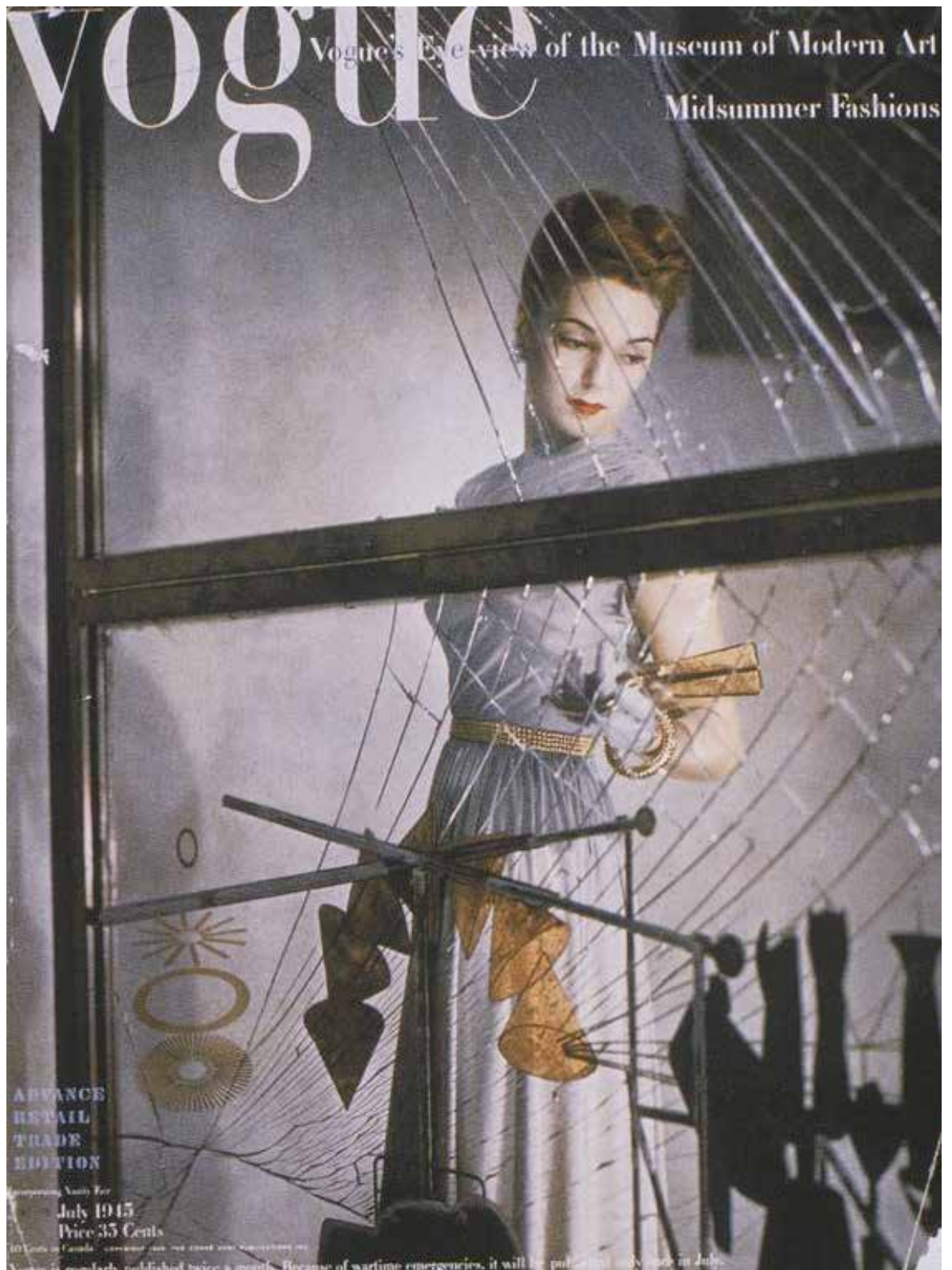


Figure 56  
Vogue Magazine's cover (July 1945)



‘Based on analysis of the structural elements of a work of art, which borrowed its vocabulary and organization from the new scientific explorations, it became known as the Fogg method.’ (Kantor, 2002, p.43). Besides this name, Kantor also indicated that it was branded the ‘Harvard’ method. Barr learnt art through a retinal perspective Duchamp could say.

Scholars trained in the Harvard method avoided theorizing in the German manner about the social and psychological context of the object. They concentrated instead on the physical attributes of the work of art and on the “grammar” of the object, an empirical approach that emphasized color and composition.’ (Kantor, 2002, p.47)

This formalist perspective to understanding art was in-built in the *modus operandi* in which Barr organised his exhibitions. From his achievements at MoMA, we can use a paradigm to demonstrate this argument at the 1936 Cubism and Abstract Art show (figures 57 to 60). This survey was one of the largest he had carried out at MoMA until then. It comprised 386 artworks including paintings, sculptures, photographs, architectural models, furniture, posters and films. Cubism and Abstract Art was a disciplinary exhibition, for both the public and the artworks. Its objective was to instruct the audience while ‘taming’ the artworks. It occupied four floors of the museum. Barr who was already implementing an aseptic environment for the presentation of artworks reached the apex in this show.

On the first floors he arranged the paintings side by side with a symmetric distance between them, the height of the painting had to respect an average eye level measurement from its centre. These are features that nowadays are commonplace but the technique evolved from this period (O’Doherty, 1986). There were also labels, loads of labels offering to the visitor a whole compendium of what they would see in each room. On the top floors of this exhibition, which would become a milestone, Barr conveyed the multidisciplinary perspective towards arts that he had been pursuing since MoMA’s foundation. He presented the Cubism and Abstract Art cross-contributions within theatre, architecture, films and design novelties. However, he did not challenge his trademark formalism. Therefore, for instance, pieces of furniture such as the Wassily and the Basculant chairs<sup>49</sup> (figure 61) were on display suspended on the wall, as paintings,

49 The Wassily Chair was designed by the Hungarian born Marcel Breuer (1902-1980) who was in charge of the furniture workshop at Bauhaus in 1925 and 1926. The Basculant chair was one of the experimental creations made by the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier (1887-1965) in 1928.



Figure 57  
1936 Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition curated by Barr in the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 58  
1936 Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition curated by Barr in the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 59  
1936 Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition curated by Barr in the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 60  
1936 Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition curated by Barr in the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 61  
Furniture on display at 1936 Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition curated by Barr in the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

highlighting their shapes but not their function or content. In the book *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions that Made Art History*, Bruce Altshuler provides a telling insight into Barr and his curatorial practice and its impacts:

The adoption of the white cube as an international standard for the display of modern and contemporary art can be credited largely to the exhibitions mounted during the 1930 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York by founding director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. But it was on a study trip to Germany in the late 1920s that Barr came upon the kind of display that he would adapt for MoMA when it was established in 1929. There—in Dorner-installed galleries at the Landesmuseum in Hanover and at the Folkwang Museum in Essen—Barr and his future architecture curator, Philip Johnson, saw pictures widely spaced and hung at eye level on a neutral background, rather than stacked salon style on dark walls. Beginning by hanging works on off-white “monk’s cloth” and later moving to walls painted bright white, in a clean architectural setting with no decorative elements to distract the eye Barr presented modern painting and sculpture in a way that highlighted their formal characteristics and relationships. Thus displayed these works could readily be set within the developmental story of modern art as a path toward abstraction, a narrative whose classic statement

he presented at the museum's 1936 exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art". But the white-cube exhibition space has long outlasted the modernist world picture with which it is associated. (2008, p.17)

The New Yorker critic McBride, the same one who had been to the first Société Anonyme exhibition in 1920 and written a review saying that Duchamp's curatorial project was 'neat', also reviewed Barr's show. Remembering that by calling the S.A.'s show 'neat', McBride also made it very clear that he had noticed Duchamp's intentions behind the 'camouflage' given to the space. Concerning it, McBride amusingly said that it was obvious that the 'protected' environment for the show was for academicians eager for Modernism's knowledge not to slip on the floor. In the following quote we read McBride's opinion on Cubism and Abstract Art:

For the new show is being historical about a thing that is not yet dead. Consequently, it is addressed to the professors and not to the impetuous, adorable, uninstructed public. It is very well done, I hasten to say, in so far as such as presentation can be well done. The sequences and derivations of the movement are very well indicated. [...] But though abstract art is here in plenty, 'abstract beauty' is not placarded in a way to win new converts. [...] Being, however one of the 'professors' myself, I confess to taking both pleasure and instruction in the event, and even to admire the courage with which the directors of the museum smite the public in the eye on the very door-step, so to speak, of the show. (McBride's text in the *New York Sun* 7 March 1936 cited in Altshuler, 2008, pp.249 and 250)

McBride's analysis confirmed that inside the bright walls of the Museum of Modern Art the loudest tone to be heard was from its director. He designed the show as one who writes a book, searching for a grammar within artworks, but it was Barr who dictated the lexicon. Not surprisingly his most prominent asset from this exhibition was the supplementary catalogue whose cover carried a chart produced by Barr that became an iconic image, which emblematises the 'progress' of Modern Art (figure 62). In order to easily explain what Modernism was, in his opinion, to the MoMA's public he preferred to literally draw it for them. Marquis, for instance, compared the chart to a biblical genealogy, that 'attempted to depict all the relations and influences among the important artists and artistic movements which had swept across the European cultural landscape since 1890'. (1989, p.153)

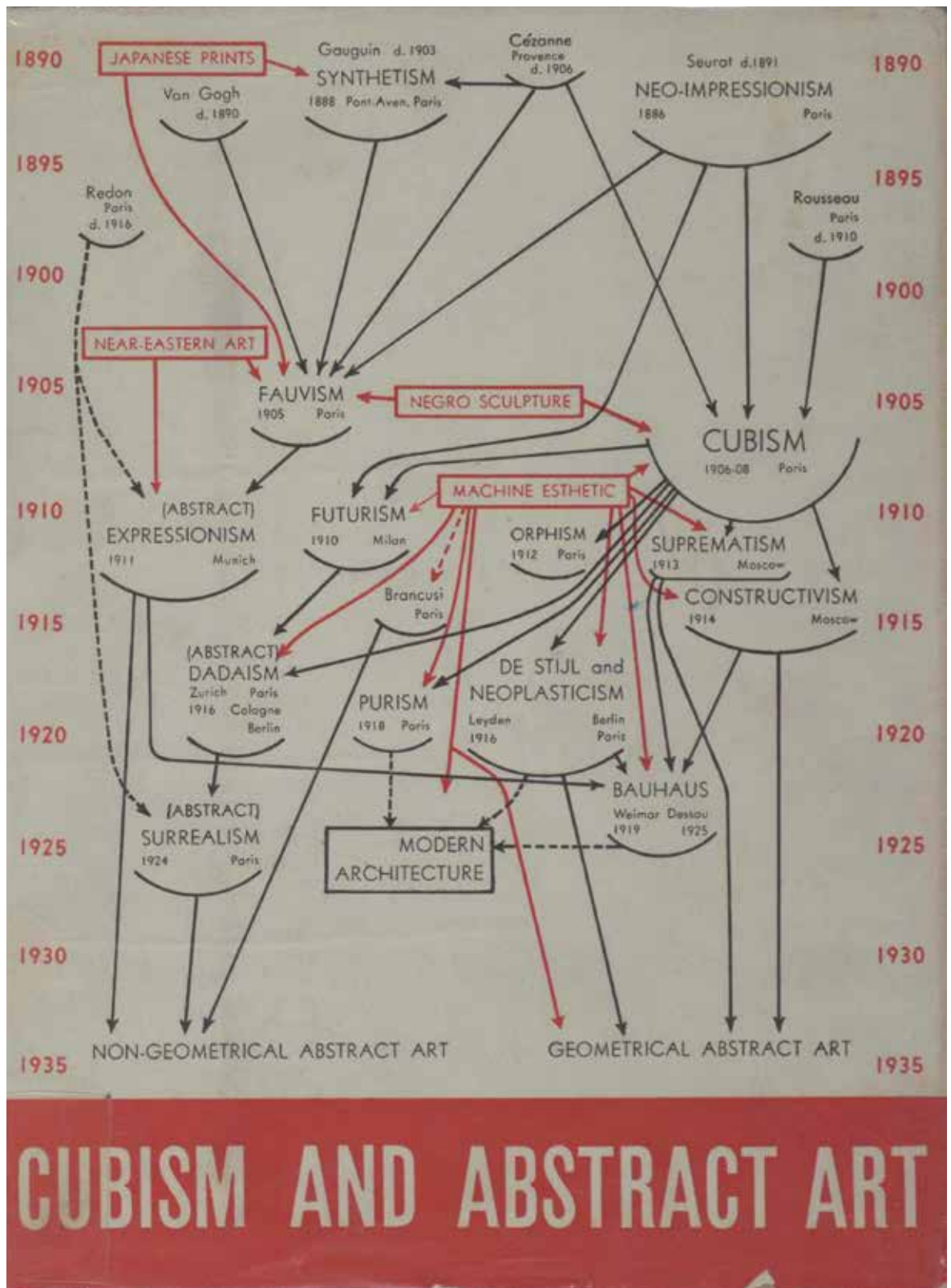


Figure 62  
Cover of the catalogue for "Cubism and Abstract Art," 1936. The catalog contains Barr's scholarly account of the history of modern art, accompanied by selected illustrations, a checklist, and bibliography.

Before the famous *Cubism and Abstract Art* chart in which Barr ‘traced the unfolding of modernist art chronologically, nationally, and stylistically.’ (Kantor, 2002, p. 325) he had already sought to encase Modernism in a chart. According to Kantor, the diagram *A Brief Survey of Modern Painting* from 1932 had been a previous attempt in which Barr laid the modernist catalyst under a scientific lens. This preceding graph has as its starting point the works of Gustave Courbet and progresses to the artists of 1925 whom Barr named super-realists: ‘After the impressionists, Barr inserted expressionism, dividing the artists into *die Brücke* under “psychological” and *les Fauves* under “decorative”’ (Kantor, 2002, p.325). Kantor then explained that Barr later dropped these concepts. The author also confirmed Barr’s tendency to polarize the different artistic expressions in that period (Kantor, 2002). Apart from that, Barr also somehow suggested that all creative minds had imperatively contact with what was being done in Paris at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Barr, the artists who had revolutionized art derived from French impressionism. Regarding the *Cubism and Abstract Art* chart, Kantor provides the following remarks:

The diagram itself approximated that of a football play or a military skirmish (both lifelong interests avidly pursued by Barr). The modernist “grid” implied that the style was in the world and could not be “pure”—that is, removed from influences. Movement by movement, in a sequential narrative, art works attained content in a historical context. In subjectless abstract art, the meaning conveyed by forms was of a synthesis of science and intuition as they crossed geographic boundaries, shaped quotidian objects, or generated invention; and forms begot new forms. (Kantor, 2002, p.327)

In this manner Barr’s instrumental view has perpetuated the idea of ‘origin and consequence’ among artistic manifestations. He graphically placed Modernism inside a constraining box, imposing labels on it, which greatly contrasts with the early attempt to spread Modernism’s diversity and peculiarities divulged by the S.A. Barr’s view is fundamentalist, a typical condition that embraced the search for certainty through Modern Thought. Here we are using the expression Modern Thought in the same manner as was analysed in the first chapter using notions offered by Foucault, Bauman, Lyotard and Santaella. The approach taken and disseminated by S.A. can be associated, perhaps, with a much more progressive and contemporary stance, or if we dare say it, a post-modernist



angle as explained by Bauman. It is progressive to the extent that the artistic language is not enclosed in a fixed 'frame' or solid grid. The S.A.'s exhibitions – curated by Duchamp and Dreier – premeditated the juxtaposition, overlapping and/or entanglement of meanings that would prove beneficial to the artworks in an exhibition. Their sagacity was ahead of their time.

In contrast, the manner in which Barr organised the exhibition space, which became the basic layout for exhibitions around the world, indicates the undeniable influence of linear Modern Thought of which he is an agent. The linear disposition pointing to a unique direction of reading and interpretation, in which the meaning is detached from the cognitive faculties of the viewer, seems to be consistent with the Modern belief in certainty and infallibility also presented in modern science. His approach is related to a certain 'Cartesian Paradox' that was how O'Doherty in the 1976 essay *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, defined this type of gallery. Answering the question from the beginning of this chapter as to whether the S.A.'s inaugural exhibition could be considered the beginning of the white cube exhibition design, if we examine O'Doherty's explanation below, we will see that it was not.

Unshadowed, white, clean artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study. Their ungrubby surfaces are untouched by time and its vicissitudes. Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of 'period' (later modern), there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has to have died already to be there. Indeed the presence of that odd piece of furniture, your own body, seems superfluous, an intrusion. The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space-occupying bodies are not – or are tolerated only as kinesthetic mannekins for further study. (O'Doherty, 1986, p.15)

Duchamp's 'neat' S.A. gallery was highly unlike what is described by O'Doherty and from what due to Barr became an emblem of the Modern curatorship. This is because, in Duchamp's case, there was the intention to create a safe place for the first presentation of a new manner of thinking art. In addition, Duchamp did not divide the artistic practices under 'isms' insignias.

As we mentioned before, the fact that he covered the architecture was to draw the attention to the artworks themselves while creating a cadence for



them as a group. A subtle ambiance was important to show a new and striking type of art for the first time in the 1920s in New York. Besides that he playfully experimented with lace paper frames.

The curatorial style that Barr imposed is of a different kind, his intention was to create a scenario and not to hide the one that was already there. He designed a building for his exhibitions, he worked alongside an architect, but he put the Arts on a kind of virtual altar.

The aseptic white cube praises the manner in which the signs are organised, highlighting the desire for control by whom proposes such order. Barr's exhibition and the model of thought that they expose are microcosms which reveal modern paradigms, the desire to order and control the world through grids, preferably immutable ones, as explained by Foucault. On the other hand, the conception envisioned by Duchamp and the S.A. was much more open, understanding that the artistic production and the way in which the art can be exhibited should respect its content and should not be limited by one singular perspective or rigid grids. Next, we will read Dreier words to Barr a few months before her death, in which she states her opinion, certainly shared by Duchamp about Barr's curatorial style.

'I must confess, Alfred, that I do not like the present mode of presentation', she wrote, in her stiff and earnest Germanic style. 'I like to go into a large rectangular room where the different men or periods are hung in groups and sit down and let them speak to me... But this repent mode of going from room to room, like a snake... is not conducive to study... I am at the mercy of the man who makes the program'. (Dreier to Barr 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1951 cited in Marquis, 1989, p.259)

This quote clearly reveals the difference between their curatorial approaches, what she and Duchamp tried to introduce when they brought Modern Art to America and what was later eternalized by Barr, the director of what was about to become the main institution that dictated how Modern Art should be presented. The point here is to understand how contemporary the approach that Duchamp had taken with the artworks was, their deep relationship with the gallery space where they were on display.

Duchamp's curatorial practice had as aim that the artworks would not only have a conversation among themselves, but also have direct communication with the public that enters the gallery to visit an exhibition. Duchamp

inaugurated the *modus operandi* that now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is widely debated. His approach can be seen as a prototype to expose contemporary art or the post-Duchampian art in which the content is visibly the igniting force of the artistic experience.

Nevertheless, conversely to what Barr did, Duchamp, as a curator with Dreier's total support and approval, never tried to inscribe a 'treatise' regarding placement of the works and the public's behaviour in a gallery room, and did not even strive to delimitate the artistic manifestations. Moreover, Duchamp, far from looking at a work and seeing only its surface, saw beyond that to taking all its interrelationships into account, he was not a formalist trying to find a visual grammar that the 'retinas' could read. As a curator he understood the whole space of the exhibition as a lively space open to dialogue. A comparison could be of an aquarium where the movement of one fish (on one side) affects the movement of all the water. Inside the water container everything affects everything. The person in charge of arranging this water environment has to foresee how this interaction will play out to better organize its elements. This will indicate the paths through which the experience in that location can be complete. However, knowing that the environment itself has its own compass, and that once all elements are together new paths may appear, there is the freedom to dive and explore around.

In summary, Duchamp's curatorial practice can be characterized as an invisible mediation between artwork and public, in which the context and space play a central role. They nurture the aesthetic experience that Duchamp, as curator and exhibition-maker, aimed to enable. The dynamics of the readymade and idea of transparency included in the *Large Glass* help us understand Duchamp's strategy. According to what is examined in Duchamp's curatorial practice, the issue of recontextualization and the awareness of our surroundings are key factors that one should pay attention to when curating an exhibition.

On the other hand, in Barr's approach, as Dreier points out, the works and visitor are at his mercy. He controls it. The exhibition becomes a programmed machine. Nevertheless, in the history of exhibition making it was Barr's tone that prevailed. Art history followed his designed charts and through the power of the Museum of Modern Art his 'grid', that divided and compartmentalized instead of projecting, became a paradigm that up to this day has not been completely overhauled. This generated a problem for contemporary art practice in general – that ironically or not, as we have seen extensively here, was essential-

ly influenced by Duchamp – this problem is especially confusing when dealing with artworks in displacement, as we shall see in the next chapter. But, before reaching that point, we will present a last analysis of some aspects introduced by Duchamp as a curator in his work in the Surrealist movement.

## **2.4 SURREALIST EXHIBITIONS**

Duchamp's role in two milestone exhibitions organized by the Surrealist movement is of particular relevance to this thesis in order to highlight his contribution as a curator and his curatorial strategies. Thus, we shall complete this chapter with comments about both displays: *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, from 17 January to 22 February 1938, at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris and the *First Papers of Surrealism*, from 14 to 15 October 1942, in New York, at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion sponsored by the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies<sup>50</sup>.

Before going ahead with the reconstruction of Duchamp's involvement with the aforementioned Surrealist exhibitions, it must not be forgotten, as discussed before in this study, that Duchamp never aligned himself with part of any Modern Art movement and it was definitely not due to a lack of invitations. Duchamp's name was associated with Cubism during the 1910s, he was considered a precursor of Dada and had a major influence on Surrealism. Modern artists orbited around him. André Breton, the Surrealist leader and an outspoken admirer of Duchamp, was a big star rotating around Duchamp's gravity.

From being mainly a literary group at its foundation in 1924 by André Breton and other poets, initiated after one disagreement with the Dada artists, Surrealism grew into an artistic movement that included all artistic languages, in an attempt to engender a multidisciplinary approach, similar to the one the Dadaists were the precursors of. Within its international expansion when artists from many parts of the world affiliated themselves to the group and inaugurated Surrealism 'branches' in their own countries, the emphasis given to painting was remarkable. This prevailed until the mid 1930s, when the Surrealists also began focusing on sculptures and a combination of objects deprived of their primary utility function, a clear influence of Duchamp's readymades. At this point, precisely in 1937, André Breton opened a gallery in Paris named *Gradiva* – it means the

50 For a descriptive and rigorous analysis of all the elements of these exhibitions with emphasis on the first one, see Kachur (2003). O'Doherty (1976) was one of the first writers to pay attention to Duchamp's installations. A more recent example of a study about Duchamp's curatorial work is found in Housefield (2016), who offers an interesting investigation about the relationship of the 1938 Surrealist show with the Parisian science museum founded one year before.

woman who walks<sup>51</sup> – to be a hub for Surrealist exhibitions. He invited Duchamp to create a permanent intervention for the space. Duchamp designed a glass door containing a human silhouette at the gallery's entrance, eternizing the visitors' passage to the exhibition space (figure 63). Subtly, Duchamp demonstrated that the viewer's reaction also belongs to the exhibition. This was one of the first contributions on view to the public by Duchamp, who in some manner was always involved with the effort made by the Surrealists. Lewis Kachur, author of *Displaying the Marvellous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and surrealist exhibition installations*, attests that Duchamp was the only visual artist on the editorial board of the *Minotaure* Surrealist journal. The art historian also implies that Duchamp was key to the realization of MoMA's show *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, from December 1936 to January 1937. According to the writer, Barr did not handle Breton's egotism well. The Surrealist leader would only lend his artworks if the selection were in accordance with his directives and choices. Obviously, Barr did not agree. Kachur (2003) wrote that even without finding conclusive results, his research led to the belief that Barr had spoken about this problem with Duchamp. The reason for this assumption is that when Barr's wife, Marga Barr, was in Europe, she had asked for Duchamp's help to act on Barr's behalf to solve the conflict. For this reason, Kachur (2003) suggested that Duchamp acting as a diplomatic agent managed to bring harmony to Barr and Breton's conversation and consequently secured artworks for MoMA's exhibition. The author also pinpointed that Duchamp did not visit the show and Barr installed it following the same pattern as the previous show, *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Nevertheless, resuming Duchamp and Breton's relationship, Kachur summarizes their friendship with a quote from the former:

Breton's admiration for Duchamp was profound, and extended beyond his art to his lifestyle. Breton even gave him the predominant credit for the 1938 show, in glowing terms: 'Its principal organizer and director was Marcel Duchamp, who had always enjoyed an unmatched prestige in the Surrealists' eyes, particularly my own, owing both to the genius that all his artistic and antiartistic interventions demonstrated, and to his exemplary emancipation from every servitude and every misery that are the price of artistic activities properly speaking.' (Kachur, 2003, p.89)

51 Gradiva is an ancient relief depicting a woman walking found in Rome and dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The sculptural relief inspired a book by the German writer Wilhelm Jensen who influenced the studies of the father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud. Both the novel and Freud's studies deeply impacted the Surrealist's ideas.



Figure 63  
 Gradiva gallery  
 Available at: <http://www.andrebreton.fr>  
 (Accessed 22 November 2016)

In turn, years later when asked by Cabanne why ‘such an independent man accepted the Surrealist draft’ Duchamp answered:

It wasn’t a draft. I had been borrowed from the ordinary world by the Surrealists. They liked me a lot; Breton liked me a lot; we were very good together. They had a lot of confidence in the ideas I could bring to them, ideas which weren’t antisurrealist, but which weren’t always Surrealist, either. (Cabanne, 1971, p.81)

The *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, 1938, completely changed the Galerie Beaux-Arts (figure 64). The public habitué of the traditional art shows at 140, Rue du Faubourg St-Honoré in Paris did not recognize the space when they arrived at the Surrealist event. Duchamp radically reinvented the Galerie Beaux-Arts transforming the eighteenth-century gallery interior into a darkened cavern. With hundreds of suspended coal bags, Duchamp covered the imposing decoration and light-racks just leaving one single light bulb on. According to Cabanne, Duchamp’s memories of the event were the following:

In the 1938, it was very amusing. I had had the idea of a central grotto, with twelve hundred sacks of coal hung over a coal grate. The grate was electric, but the insurance companies said no. We did it anyway, and then they accepted it. Besides, the sacks were empty. [...] There was coal dust. They were real sacks, which had been found in la Villette. There were papers inside, newspapers, which filled them out. (Cabanne, 1971, p.81)

At the gallery, black dust from the coal sacks was spread everywhere (figure 65). The floor was carpeted with dead leaves and the aroma of coffee filled the air. This latter was the sensorial intervention titled *Odeurs du Brésil* contributed by the Surrealist French poet Benjamin Péret (1899-1959). In order to make the atmosphere even more multi-sensorial there was a soundtrack playing sounds similar to shouts from an asylum and military music. In this environment there were around 230 artworks by 60 artists from 14 countries on display apart from books, documents and unconventional furniture (figures 66 to 68).

According to Kachur (2003), there is not enough evidence about how the negotiations between the Surrealists and the gallery owner Georges Wildenstein (1892-1963) began. He had never before opened the space to such a daring installation. The Surrealist display contrasted with the tendencies presented at the *haut bourgeois* establishment. Wildenstein earned his reputation as an art ex-

INVITATION  
pour le  
17 Janvier 1938  
TENUE DE SOIRÉE

EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE  
DU  
**SURRÉALISME**

A 22 heures  
signal d'ouverture  
par André BRETON

APPARITIONS  
D'ÊTRES-OBJETS

L'HYSTÉRIE

LE TRÈFLE  
INCARNAT

L'ACTE MANQUÉ

PAR

Hélène  
VANEL

COQS ATTACHÉS

CLIPS  
FLUORESCENTS



Le descendant authentique de Frankenstein, l'automate "Enigmarelle", construit en 1900 par l'ingénieur américain Ireland, traversera, à minuit et demi, en fausse chair et en faux os, la salle de l'Exposition Surréaliste.

DESCENTE  
DE LIT  
EN FLANCS D'  
HYDROPHILES

LES  
PLUS BELLES  
RUES DE PARIS

TAXI PLUVIEUX

CIEL DE  
ROUSSETTES

**GALERIE BEAUX-ARTS, 140, RUE DU FAUBOURG SAINT-HONORÉ — PARIS**

Figure 64  
Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme. Invitation to the opening, 17 January 1938



Figure 65  
1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme. Installation view.



pert, with classy exhibitions of past modern artists such as Paul Cézanne. He was also a publisher, editor of the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. The director of the Wildenstein gallery, as it was also named, was the art writer Raymond Cogniat (1896-1977) who was organizing the series of exhibitions *étapes de l'art contemporain*. In order to publicize the Surrealist event, Cogniat published the following text at Beaux-Arts:

As has already been indicated, the aim is not to show only a particular kind of painting or sculpture, or to put forward new aesthetic theories. The Surrealist Exhibition is intended as something more deeply disturbing as the gateway to a world of mystery in which burlesque looms less large than anxiety, in which the visitors' laughter conceals their disquiet and their anger is an expression of bafflement. Surrealism is not a game, but an obsession. (*Beaux-Arts: Revue d'Information Artistique*, 14 January 1938 cited in Altshuler, 2008, p.290)

Regarding the overseeing of the 'Marvellous' display that 'baffled' the visitors to the Parisian sophisticated gallery, Breton designated Duchamp as *générateur-arbitre*, a term that can be literally translated as 'Generator-Arbitrator' (figure 69). This combination of words leaves room for the poetic interpretation of 'an independent person appointed to settle a creative dispute', as *arbitre* means an independent evaluator or a game's referee and *générateur* comes from the Latin word *generat* which means 'created' derived from the verb *generare*.

Another playful reading could be the person who decides, reconciles or solves at the same time that he creates, generates or invents. This would be a unique term for a unique action that nowadays we do have a specific term for. If the Surrealists had inserted the term 'Generator-Arbitrator' in their dictionary<sup>52</sup> (figure 70), which was also on display at the 1938 show, we could probably bet that the definition for the peculiar term would be: 'curator'.

As *générateur-arbitre* Duchamp was in charge of designing the exhibition space. Besides the coal sacks obscuring the ceiling, there was some water on the floor and four beds with yellow velvet could be found in different parts of the gallery. Duchamp had the original idea of using revolving doors from de-

52 The 1938 *Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surréalisme* edited by Breton and Éluard who organized the unofficial publication to be launched at the same time of the exhibition. The book is composed by circa 75 pages with unorthodox entries written by surrealist and non-surrealist collaborators that offer to the reader a Surreal lexicon. Duchamp contributed with few entries, including a famous definition of 'readymade' (figure 71): 'an ordinary object promoted to the dignity of art object simply by way of the artist's choice.' (*Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surréalisme*, 1938, p.23, version in English by Duve, 1996, p.93).



Figure 66  
1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme. Installation view.



Figure 67  
1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme. Installation view.



Figure 68  
Unconventional furniture at the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme

EXPOSITION  
INTERNATIONALE  
DU  
SURREALISME

Janvier-Février 1938



ORGANISATEURS { André Breton.  
Paul Eluard.

GÉNÉRATEUR-ARBITRE : Marcel Duchamp.

ASSISTANT : Claude Le Gentil.

CONSEILLERS SPÉCIAUX { Salvador Dali.  
Max Ernst.

MAITRE DES LUMIÈRES : Man Ray.

EAUX ET BROUSSAILLES : W. Paalen.

Mannequins de la Maison P. L. E. M. habillés par Yves Tanguy, André Masson, Kurt Seligmann, Sonia Mossé, Hans Arp, Oscar Domínguez, Léo Malet, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, Joan Miro, Marcel Jean, Man Ray, Espinoza, Matta Echaurren, Maurice Henry, Salvador Dali.

*Plafond chargé de 1.200 sacs à charbon*

*Portes « Revolver »*

*Lampes Mazda*

*Échos*

*Odeurs du Brésil*

*et le reste à l'avenant.*



GALERIE BEAUX-ARTS  
140, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré — PARIS

Figure 69  
1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme. Installation view.



DICTIONNAIRE ABRÉGÉ  
DU  
SURREALISME

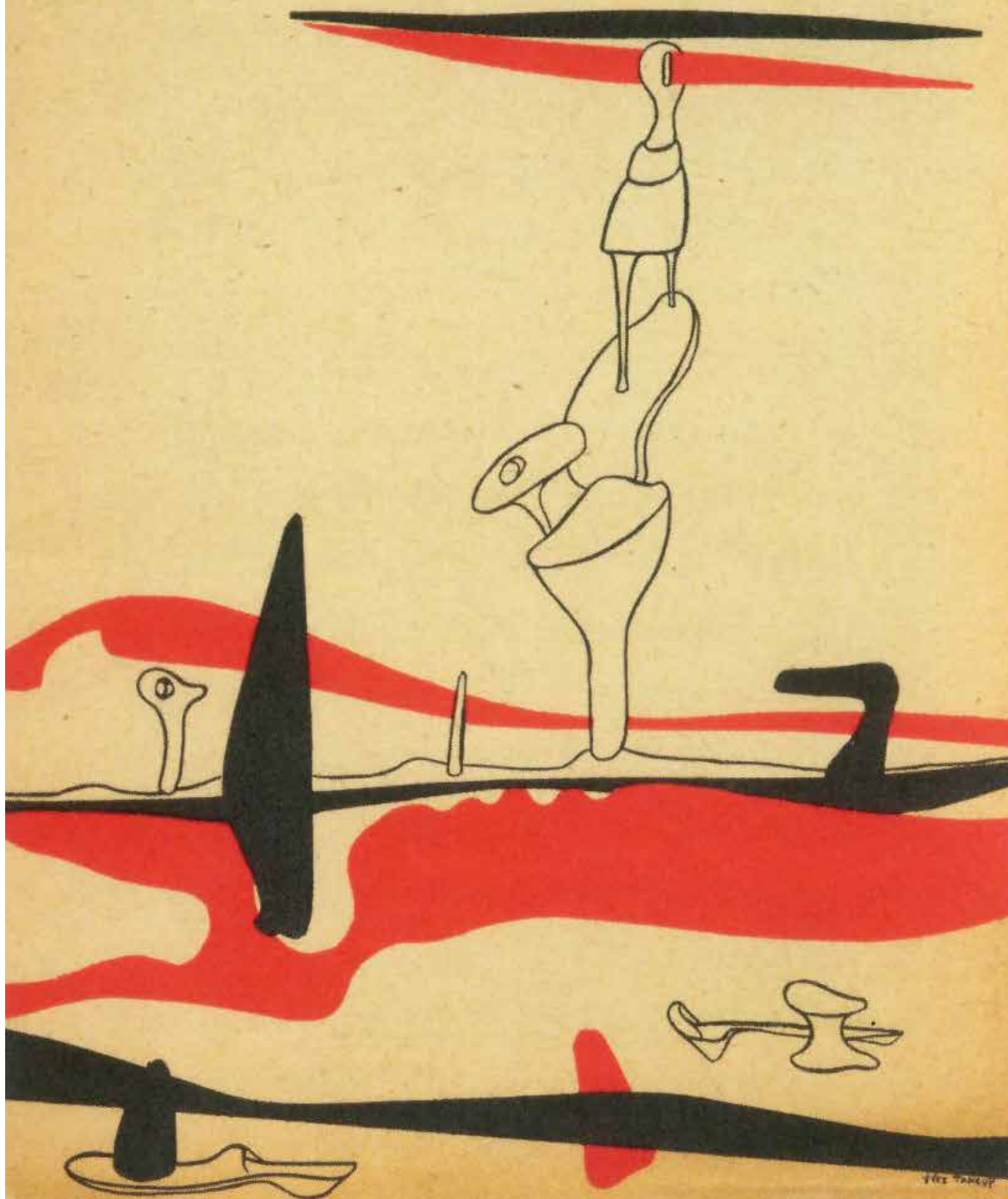


Figure 70  
Cover of the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*

partment stores as backdrops for the paintings in addition to the gallery's walls. Sculptures, surreal objects and furniture were distributed near the corners of the rooms, and in the centre of the main area Duchamp mounted an iron brazier that did not illuminate the space.

As a curator he was also in charge of commissioning a special installation for the show. Duchamp asked some artists to create interventions on 16 ordinary female mannequins that would inhabit the *Surrealist Street* that he planned to place at the entrance of the gallery (figures 72 to 74). In this role, Duchamp 'generated' a special combination of unusual elements, most of them never seen in an art exhibition, which brought about an abstract connection between the artworks that allowed the audience to easily perceive the Surrealist principles.

Another crucial element to our understanding of Duchamp's approach to the exhibition was the idea of installing sensors in the space that would turn on light-spots once the visitor got closer to any painting (figures 75 and 76). As he was ahead of his time, some sort of kinetic sensor did not exist back in 1938. However, his friend Man Ray assisted him by adapting the idea for the opening night using flashlights. Man Ray and Salvador Dalí were nominated *Conseillers Spéciaux*, the special advisors. In the courtyard facing the main entrance, Dalí parked his *Rainy Taxi*, in which he inventively made it rain inside with tubes of running water (figures 77 and 78). There was a mannequin in the driver's seat and another in the back, both covered with live snails. Returning to Duchamp's idea of 'magic eyes' on the show, we can see the description and analysis by Filipovic:

Just as significant to our understanding of the exhibition is an element that wasn't realized. As Marcel Jean recalls, "Duchamp had thought of installing 'magic eyes' so that the lights would have gone on automatically as soon as the spectator had broken an invisible ray when passing in front of the painting. Duchamp's wish proved unfeasible, but Man Ray adapted the idea for the opening night, turning out the lights and handing out flashlights at the entrance so that visitors could use them to view the artworks "on display". The solution retained much of Duchamp's original intention: the viewers got close to the art, leaning forward to focus their hand-held electric lights—an act in distinct contrast to the notion of "proper distance," disembodied viewing, and the "enlightening" clarity of the traditional museum or gallery. Even in its adapted form, one notes a concern with perception and a continuation of that assault on visual autonomy that so interested Duchamp—

ABBREVIATIONS

L. A. — Louis ARAGON  
H. A. — Hans ARP  
A. A. — Antoine ARTAUD  
H. B. — Hans BELLMER  
A. B. — André BRETON  
R. C. — René CREVEL  
S. D. — Salvador DALI  
R. D. — Robert DESNOS  
M. D. — Marcel DUCHAMP  
P. E. — Paul ELUARD  
M. E. — Max ERNST  
M. H. — Maurice HEINE  
G. H. — Georges HUGNET  
M. L. — Michel LEIRIS  
G. L. — Gilbert LELV  
J. L. — Jean LÉLY

P. M. — Pierre MABILLE  
M. R. — MAN RAY  
E. M. — E. L. T. MESENS  
P. N. — Pierre NAVILLE  
V. N. — Vladimir NEZVAL  
P. N. — Paul NOUGÉ  
W. P. — Wolfgang PAALEN  
H. P. — Henri PANTOUREAU  
B. P. — Benjamin PÉRET  
P. P. — Pablo PICASSO  
J. P. — Jacques PRÉVÈRE  
G. R. — Guy ROSBY  
J. S. — Jean SCUTENAIRE  
P. S. — Philippe SORPAILLE  
T. T. — Tristan TZARA  
Cah. ex. — Cahiers exposés



ABSSAÏNE — «... ces fruits mûrissent si communément, incapables de s'élever jusqu'à la logique de l'Absurde, à l'absolutisme, à la détermination de la logique jusqu'à l'absolue, l'usage de l'absurde jusqu'à la raison... » (P. E.)

ABI — « dans l'air blanc et noir » (Lautréamont), « Ma Laine, c'est les bruits d'un noir » (Rimbaud), « L'air de la chambre est bon comme des biguettes de tambour » (A. B.)

AMI — « Toi, jeune homme, ne te déçois pas ; car tu es un ami dans le vampire, malgré son aspect contraire. En comptant l'incarné sceptique qui protège la gale, tu arrives des biguettes de tambour » (A. B.)

deux amis. » (Lautréamont), « Mais Lait — je suis l'ami de l'air — et des grands fleuves blancs — l'ami du sang et de la terre — je les connais je les touche — je peux les tenir dans mes mains » (P. S.)

AMOUR — « L'Amour incognito, le seul qui saurait nous occuper ici, est celui qui met en jeu l'inductif dans la pratique. L'imagination dans le présent, la loi dans le droit, la perception de l'objet intérieur dans l'objet extérieur » (A. B. et P. E.), « Je l'aimais comme la langue d'autrui, sous la pierre qui l'a faite égarée » (B. P.), « L'Amour a fini de se perdre par delà le bien et le mal, mais, très simplement, l'Amour fait de tout mal un bien et de tout bien un mal. » (B. C.), « Tout nous amène à penser que l'Amour ne serait qu'une sorte d'incarnation des rêves cherchant l'expression inutile qui veut que la femme aime soit un rêve qui s'est fait chair. » (S. D.), « J'appose à l'Amour — des images toutes faites — au lieu d'images à faire. » (P. E.)

ANACHRONISME — « Cataclysme sentimentale péchant d'arrière-pensée de peu nouvelle. » (S. D.)

ANGOSSE — Lampe qui file avec des traits de rapide.

ANIMAL — « L'animal comme la lampe — un peu plus que l'homme » (P. E.), « Tous nos animaux sont obligés — ils ont des pieds de marbre — et des mains de fer » (P. E.), « Les animaux sont beaux parce qu'ils sont nus — à l'intérieur aussi. » (G. H.)

ARAGON (Louis), né en 1897 — Écrivain surréaliste, de l'école du Mouvement à 1932, date à laquelle il démissionne volontairement toute son activité poétique. Directeur de la Maison de la Culture, puis d'un grand journal du soir, (*Le Libertaire*, *Le Peuple de Paris*, *Traité du Style*, *La Poésie du Dilemme*).

ARHÈRE — « L'âne de l'âne mort qui tient tête à la terre » (P. E.), « Un arête abaisse un peu tout — deux amis — et la tête de l'âne » (B. P.)

ARGOT — « L'argot de Rinsu Selavy, n'est-ce pas l'art de transformer en images les choses ? » (R. D.)

ARHÈRE (Achilles d'), 1884-1893 — « L'œuvre d'Arhère doit son intérêt particulière à ce qu'elle constitue, de par ses déterminations, la forme géométrique de phénomènes concrets de l'esprit la plus grave et dont nous sommes obligés de constater l'environnement jusqu'à nous » (A. B.)

ARP (Hans), né en 1897 — « L'anguille des rêves. Peintre, sculpteur et poète surréaliste. Il a écrit : *Die Wälder*, *Pyramiden*, *Des tâches dans le vide*, *Poissons*. »

ART — Copie blanche dans une coquette d'eau.

ARTAUD (Antonin), né en 1898 — « La machine surréaliste » Écrivain, poète surréaliste et acteur. A dirigé la Centrale surréaliste en 1935. (*Le Peuple* 1935), *L'Œuvre des rêves*, *Révolutions*, etc.)

ASSASSINAT — « La tranquillité des assassinats anciens et futurs. » (M. E.)



R. E.

POUCE — « Le pouce est ce gros cabotier flammant, d'humour gouailleux et grivois, qui fume sur sa porte, à l'enseigne de la double tête de mort. » (*Alchimie Rétinale*). « Dans le pouce était assis un théâtre d'ombres pour que les mains pussent devenir des lèches, des oiseaux, des paysages. (G. H.), « P'ou n'est pas, p'ou n'est pas. Le sexe est le premier pouce, l'époux le pouce. Le pouce arrive à sa perfection en même temps que le sexe. Le pouce sert à prendre les poux et les pouces. On vit le pouce pousser, et il servait aussi à prendre les poux-pouces des plantes. » (J. P. Breton)

POULTE — « L'ouïe au regard de nuit. » (Lautréamont).



M. A.

POUPÉE — « Ne serait-ce pas dans la poupée, malgré sa docilité accommodante et sans borne, s'entrevoir d'une réserve d'inspiration, ne serait-ce pas dans la réalité même de la poupée que l'imagination trouverait ce qu'elle cherchait de plus, d'exaltation et de peur ? Ne serait-ce pas dans le triomphe défilant sur les adolescents dans grands yeux qui se détachent, si, sous le regard croissant pillant leurs charmes, les doigts agiles assaillant la forme plastique et s'entrevoient lentement, menées à mesure, ce que les sens et le cerveau s'étaient approprié. » (H. B.)

POUSSIÈRE — Élevage de poissons. (M. D.)

PRASSINOS (Gaston) célèbre poète — « Alice II s. Poète surréaliste. (*La Souterraine* 1933), *Quand le monde s'écroule*, etc.)

PRÉCIEUX — Un bonhomme demanda un jour un bonhomme Diable. — Qu'est-ce qui est le plus précieux au monde ? — N'importe quoi, moi, ça change, la tête d'un chat mort, répondit bonhomme Diable. — Pourquoi ? — Parce qu'on ne peut l'évaluer.

PRÉVÈRE (Jacques). — « Celui qui rouge de cœur ». Poète. Activité surréaliste proprement dite de 1916 à 1929. « A pris part, depuis lors, à la réalisation de films, concertés à l'occasion ultérieures. Poèmes : *L'induction à un dîner de flics*, *La Crosse en l'air*, *Dilemme*, etc.)



QUOTIENT — « On peut exprimer la démarche essentielle du surréaliste en disant qu'il s'agit pour lui de calculer le quotient de l'inconscient par le conscient. » (P. N.)



(Continuer — deux faces — l'abandon de la langue humaine d'un de ses fragments.)



READY MADE — Objet quelconque à la dignité d'objet d'art par le simple choix de l'artiste. « Ready made récapitule le service d'un fondeur comme plaisir à le réposer. » (M. H.)



M. A.

RÉALITÉ — « La réalité est aux doigts de cette femme qui scelle la première page des dictionnaires. » (B. C.), « La Réalité devient le point de départ de ce qui se cache et se cache, ignore, nier la mouvance éternelle des réalités, leurs projections sur tous les plans — intellectuel, moral, scientifique, poétique, philosophique, etc. — eux-mêmes tout à fait existentiels et réducteurs, en lieu d'être à surprise ou en terre de plante balbutie. » (B. C.)

REPOPULATION — « Reste dans celui qui opère sur la vanité des morts, la barrière de la repopulation. » (M. E.)

REPRÉSENTATION — « Les représentations conventionnelles des sources géométriques de la nature ne sont séduisantes qu'en fonction de leur puissance d'obscurcissement. » (A. B. et P. E.)

RETAÏD — « Employer « retai » au lieu de tableau ou peinture... Un retai en verre comme un dîner un poisson en prose ou un crachoir en argent » (M. B.)

RÊVE — « Le rêve n'est rien autre que poésie involontaire » (L. H. v. Jakob), « Des signes assez nombreux nous avertissent que le poète du sommeil repart par intermittence dans la veille, et qu'inversement le poète du jour participe à la vie onirique. » (J. V. Trévis), « En vérité, il y a plus d'une tête qui nous instruit davantage avec ses rêves réels qu'avec ceux de sa fantaisie. » (Jean-Paul), « Le Rêve est une seconde vie. Je n'ai pu peindre sans briser ces portes d'osier ou de corne qui nous séparent de la mort » (Verd), « Rien ne vous apparaît plus ou moins que vos rêves. Sujet, forme, d'acte, acteur, spectateur — dans ces oniriques, vous êtes tout vous-même ! » (Nizkor), « Que le poète ne s'est-il permis plus récemment encore en faveur de la nature, poète de son, des rêves ? » (Proust), « ... faire valoir ce qui peut exister de commun entre les représentations de la veille et celles du sommeil. C'est seulement, en effet, lorsque la notion de leur identité sera parfaitement acquise que l'on parviendra à tirer clairement parti de leur différence, de manière à rendre de leur sens la conception matérialiste du monde réel. » (A. B.), « Il n'y a plus de similitudes dans cette solitude... je suis cette vie insulaire : un être dont les origines remontent au delà de tout ce que je puis connaître, dont le sort dépasse les horizons où atteint mon regard... La solitude de la poésie et du rêve nous enlève à notre dissolante solitude. » (A. Rigoux).

REVOLVER — « L'art du revolver regarde aux idées l'invisible bruit de japper gris foncé. » (Jarry), « L'usage du revolver serait une si douce méthode » (P. S.)

REVUES SURRÉALISTES — La revue *Libération* (13 numéros : 1919-1924) peut être considérée comme la première en date des revues surréalistes. Elle publie en effet, des



M. B. : Ready made

Figure 71  
Pages of the Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme



Figure 72  
Mannequins at the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme



Figure 73  
Mannequins at the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme





Figure 74  
Mannequins at the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme



Figure 75  
Visitors with flashlights at the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme



Figure 76  
Visitors with flashlights at the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme



Figure 77  
Dali's Rainy Taxi in the courtyard of the Galerie Beaux-Arts



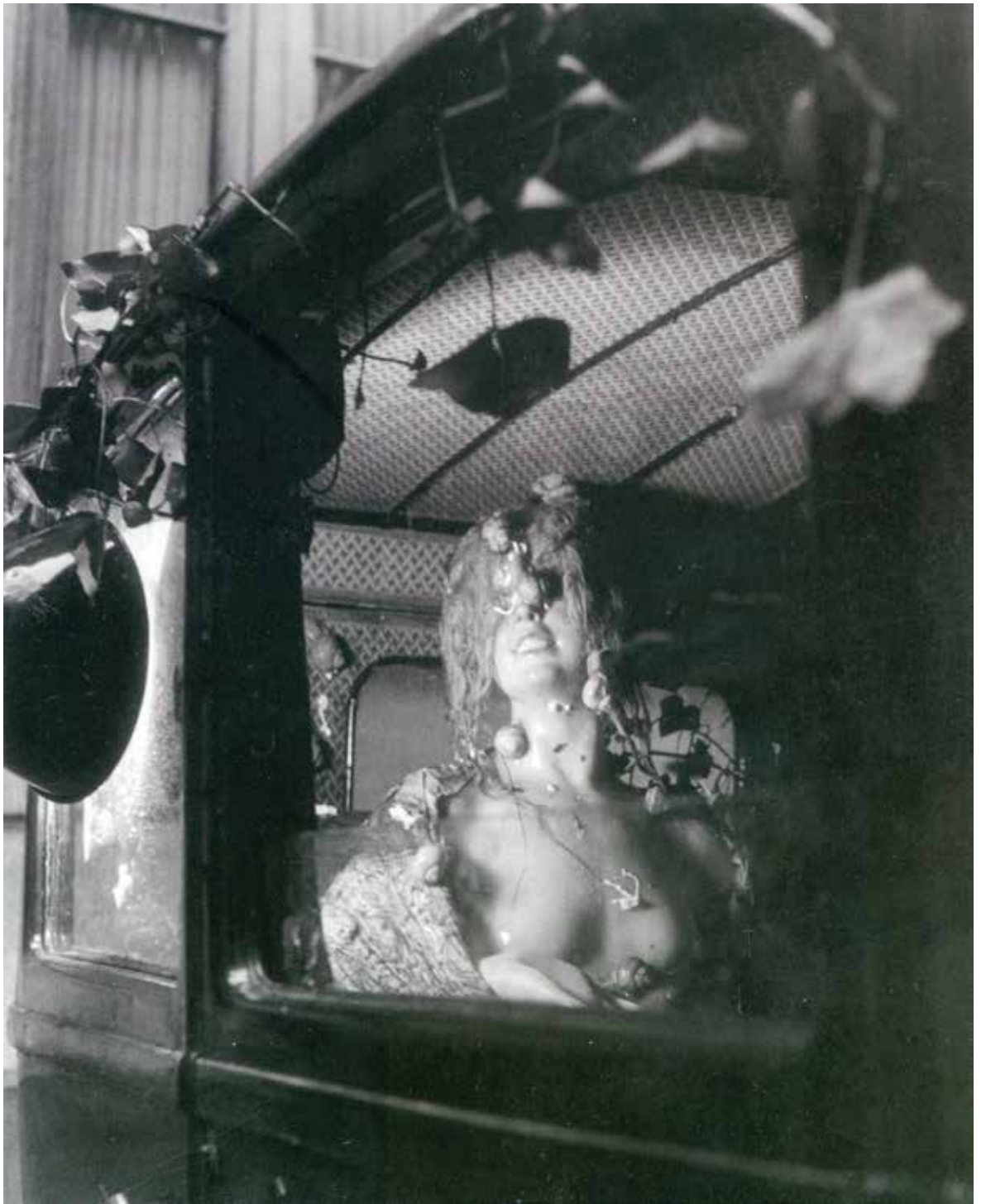


Figure 78  
Dali's Rainy Taxi (detail)

from his efforts to contravene retinality to his “precision optics” experiments with motorized optical machines and spinning Rotoreliefs. (Filipovic, 2008, p. 3)

Ultimately, Filipovic brings to the spotlight Duchamp’s function as a curator and some of the aspects that he conveyed in exhibition making. With this comment she clarifies some of the issues that this thesis also aims to elucidate. Filipovic claims that ‘Exhibitions and the questions of public display were far from unproblematic for Duchamp’ (Filipovic, 2008, p.xx). The unease that accompanied Duchamp when organizing, conceiving and setting up exhibitions, resides not only in the selection of artworks and the configuration of their display, but also in what can be done to enable the viewer or the visitor to autonomously join and complete the artistic experience proposed by artists, once s/he is in contact with an artwork in an exhibition.

At the newly organized modern museums and display spaces, so in vogue in Paris in the 1930s, the spectator was choreographed to keep a safe distance, to look disinterestedly, and to forget his or her body. Duchamp, on the other hand, seemed to want to make explicit that vision’s condition of possibility is the approach of the body—that vision is decidedly corporeal. For Duchamp, the interrogation of the autonomy of vision went hand-in-hand with a rethinking of that site so invested in maintaining it—the Cartesian exhibition space. It is perhaps in the context of his exhibition designs, therefore, that one best understands Duchamp’s complex visual exercises and their centrality to his corpus—his persistent preoccupation with visuality questioned not only what and how we see, but, ultimately, what and how institutions of art make us see. (Filipovic, 2008, p.3)

Even more can be said about this intention to provoke a certain corporification of the artistic experience. Differently from the Cartesian thought that intends to separate elements and possesses certainty of contents, Duchamp transposes to the exhibition an understanding of the experience as something that is not detached from the whole context. The physical presence, the visual perception, the environment which provides sensorial inputs, the dialogue produced from the combination of artworks, the contextual background of the artistic project of each artwork, all are brought to the surface of the gallery space. The curator must convey these essential aspects so that the artwork can be properly perceived once it reaches the public. Their orchestration can be grasped through different

strategies and procedures. Part of Duchamp's legacy was to pave the way for curators to be able to coordinate this operation when dealing with post-Duchampian art. Nevertheless, few art historians have dared to express it in these terms<sup>53</sup>. Filipovic is one of them, when she says for example that 'he [Duchamp] agrees to take on the exhibition-designer role, which leads to the first of a series of collaborations with Duchamp as curator/designer of exhibitions that radically reconceive what the space of an art exhibition could look like.' (Filipovic, 2008, p. 3). The only oversight in this sentence, as we have discovered in this thesis, is that the Surrealist exhibition was not Duchamp's first collaboration as a curator, he had actually been involved with this since the beginning of his trajectory when, still with his brothers in Puteaux, he helped organize the *Salon de la Section d'Or*.

Moreover, besides being the head of exhibitions of the *Société Anonyme*, Duchamp was responsible for many other shows and worked as a collection consultant. In a brief recapitulation of what has been cited in this thesis, Duchamp for instance organized Brancusi's solo exhibitions, he worked for the Louise and Walter Arensberg's collection and organised exhibitions for Peggy Guggenheim. As indicated before, although all of them are important achievements, in order to narrow down the scope of this thesis we have primarily examined his function as a curator and exhibition-maker of group shows.

Kachur, for example, who delved into the reconstruction of the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, and *First Papers of Surrealism*, in many ways triggers the readers of his study into considering Duchamp as a curator, but the writer is hesitant to proclaim that. In the introduction of the book *Displaying the Marvellous*, he suggested that Duchamp was a precursor of 'installation art':

This book reconstructs in detail three elaborate Surrealist exhibition installations created between 1938 and 1942. [...] In each setting the participants abandoned any attempt at neutrality of presentation in favour of a subjective environment that itself embodied a statement. Indeed, these exhibitions offered startled viewers an early version of installation art, before there was such a phrase for this form. [...] Two of the installations, for the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* (1938) and the *First Papers of Surrealism* (1942), were created largely by Marcel Duchamp and significantly bracket the years of his relocation from

53 Just as a speculative exercise, perhaps, the motivating factor is that many of the changes in the art field that happened in the 20th Century have been credited to Duchamp, thus his achievements as a curator were neglected.

Paris to New York at the beginning of World War II. The first exhibition, in Paris, was widely commented upon and highly influential. [...] Duchamp's displays have continued to have an impact on subsequent installation art, even up to our day. (2003, p.xiii and xiv)

Nevertheless, these remarks are a little ambiguous. If the author affirmed that Duchamp had planned what he proposed to the show as an artwork manifested as 'installation art', Kachur (2003) would not have taken into consideration that Duchamp's contribution to the Surrealist shows encompassed the whole exhibition and did not interact solely with a specific space or area. But, the art historian did in fact consider that Duchamp's involvement with both shows was stronger than any other artist. Later in his introduction he also pronounces:

This study also seeks to counterbalance the literature on Marcel Duchamp, which has overinterpreted his readymades and *Large Glass* while minimizing his late productions as well as his substantial involvement with the Surrealists. [...] Building on these foundations, I posit that Duchamp expanded the definition of "artist" to include involvement in the art world as well as the role of the exhibition designer. However familiar this expanded definition has since become, it was quite novel in its day. (Kachur, 2003, p.xvi)

The researcher in addition to classifying Duchamp as a precursor of installation art, also says that he was one of the first to become an 'artist-publisher' or 'art consultant'. Nevertheless, there is an absolute reluctance toward calling Duchamp a curator. Kachur (2003) also mentions the myth of Duchamp's retirement, evidencing that he was actually carrying out different functions in the art world. 'By focusing on this later period of his activity and influence on the art world, we may perceive a more grounded image of Duchamp, as well as of that art world.' (Kachur, 2003, p.9). Identifying Duchamp as a pioneer of installation art and other art categories always brings the function of 'artist' to the forefront of every analysis. This action isolates Duchamp's legacy as a curator, the same heritage that Kachur in fact studied so carefully. Thus, would enrich the research field to comprehend Duchamp's function as the 'generator' of experiences within the composition of an exhibition. The coal dust, dead leaves and flashlights that he availed himself of demonstrate a concept that transposes the dialogue among the artworks on display. More recent publications such as *Playing with Earth and Sky: Astronomy, Geography, and the art of Marcel Duchamp* by Housefield do indeed present Duchamp in a role closer to that of a contemporary curator: 'this



book presents Duchamp as a designer of experiences that might engage minds and bodies.” (Housefield, 2016, Loc 449), and about the 1938 Surrealist exhibition the authors affirm: ‘The invitation signalled that Duchamp had already conceived new approaches to the transformation of an exhibition space into a site of immersive experience’ (Housefield, 2016, Loc 3474). A better illustrative example of this concept that was in reality a curatorial strategy that served to link the artworks is the big web that he generated for the First Papers of Surrealism (figures 79 and 80).

This exhibition held at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in Manhattan received this singular title in allusion to the wave of artists who found in the U.S. a new home after escaping from the turbulence that Europe had become subjected to with the dreadful progress of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. First Papers of Surrealism was a reference to the bureaucratic nightmare to obtain a visa to live in the country. Duchamp, for example, had arrived in New York on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1942 after a battle to ensure his right to stay in the U.S. First Papers of Surrealism took place from 14<sup>th</sup> October to 7<sup>th</sup> November of the same year. Breton was already in New York and, as Duchamp later recalled, was happy to see him, and in August they began organizing the event, which had a beneficent side. The funds gathered with the ticket price would be redirected to the event holder, a French charity organization, the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies. Kachur (2003) also pointed out that some artworks were available for purchase in addition to postcards. Duchamp also designed an exquisite catalogue that could also be bought by the public: ‘Thus on several fronts the Surrealists cooperated with their hosts, for the benefit of French prisoners and children, presumably as a *quid pro quo* for the use of the site.’ (Kachur, 2003, p.170)

Differently from the 1938 show, the place chosen for the largest self-organized Surrealist exhibition in America until then had never been a setting for that kind of display. The Whitelaw Reid Mansion built in 1884 had an over-decorated interior, an awkward style for such an enterprise. According to Kachur, its gilded mouldings were an 19<sup>th</sup> century attempt at a Renaissance revival, that did not even make Peggy Guggenheim’s eyes<sup>54</sup> shine brightly, the eccentric art

54 Peggy Guggenheim (1898-1979) was a U.S. art collector and dealer who built an impressive collection of 20<sup>th</sup> century Art that is in Venice nowadays, on display in the 18<sup>th</sup> century palace that she went to live in after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. According to her biography published on her collection’s website, she met Duchamp and other artists in the 1920s when she moved to Paris. (<http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/museum/peggy.html>). This information ought to be correct as, from 1915 onwards, Duchamp divided his time between New York and Europe, mainly Paris (besides the nine months that he spent in Buenos Aires when the U.S entered the 1<sup>st</sup> World War). But, according to Duchamp’s biographer, Tom-



Figure 79  
1942 First papers of Surrealism installation view.

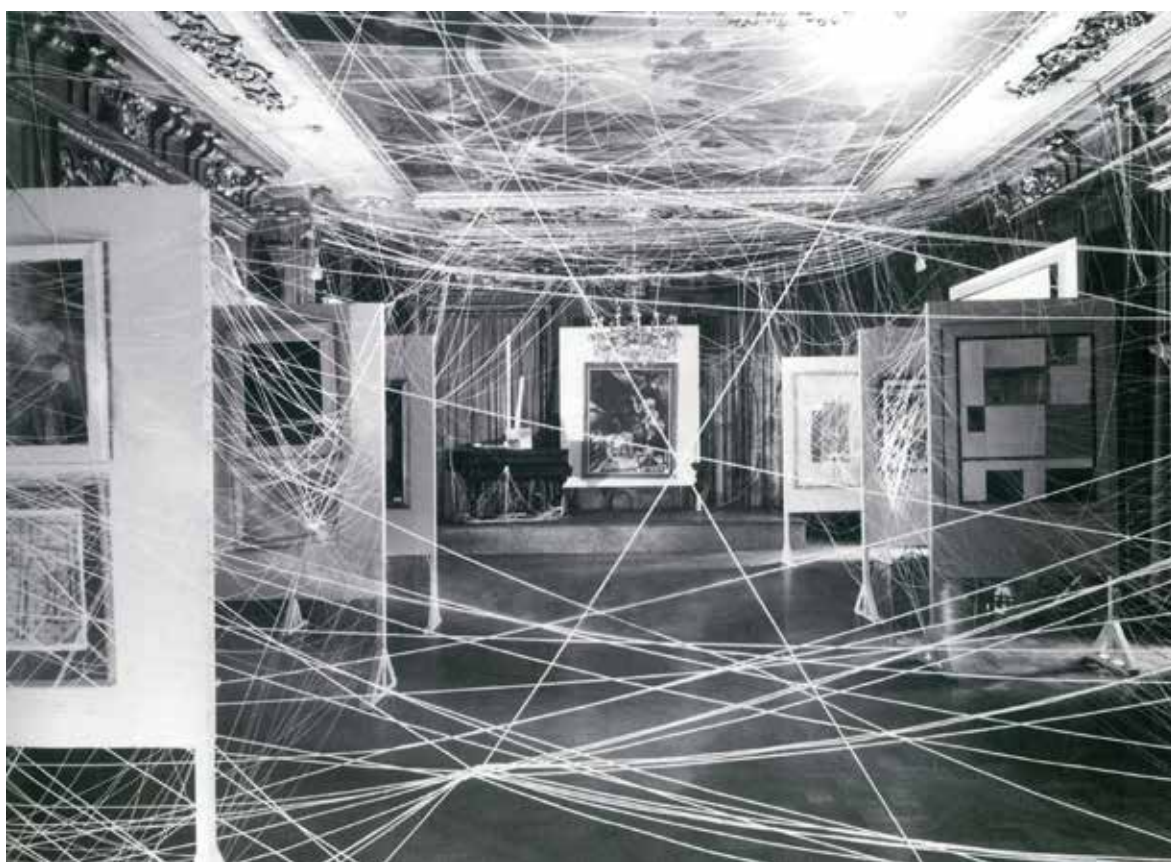


Figure 80  
1942 First papers of Surrealism installation view.

patroness who was one of the project's supporters. She would say that it was 'an ugly, old-fashioned building' (cited in Kachur, p. 179). The art critic McBride in his review *Surrealism Gets Near: The Old Whitelaw Reid Mansion Is Invaded by Modernists* in the *New York Sun* highlighted the peculiarity of the place: 'The mansion, one of few remaining palaces of the capitalistic period, should be preserved in its entirety for a posterity which certainly would not believe it from a mere description.' (McBride, 16 October 1942, cited in Altshuler, 2008, p.306). McBride in a peevish or perhaps witty tone also commented:

The mere idea of such a show in such a place is enough to arouse the living and to stir the dead. How uneasily the vanished members of the Reid family must have twisted in their graves on Wednesday evening when the show opened.' (McBride, 16 October 1942, cited in Altshuler, 2008, p.306).

McBride's insinuation that the exhibition was so shocking that it would even disturb the previous homeowner's ghosts is based chiefly on a single element that permeated the whole exhibition: Duchamp's twine. Once more invited to install the Surrealism exhibition, Duchamp created the conditions for the

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kins, and her biographer, Mary Dearborn, author of *Mistress of Modernism: The Life of Peggy Guggenheim*, if they did meet during the 1920s they were merely acquaintances. A real friendship and partnership would just happen from 1937 on when Peggy decided to open a gallery in London named Guggenheim Jeune. She, as Tomkins (2005) commented, practically made Duchamp the director of her gallery without a proper salary. Dearborn recounted how important Duchamp was to Peggy, quoting the patroness herself: 'Peggy would have been well aware of Duchamp's reputation. The sheer good humour (or was it that?) of many of his actions would have appealed to her sensibility. She later wrote that at the time her London gallery opened, "I couldn't distinguish one thing in art from another. Marcel tried to educate me." She went on, "I don't know what I would have done without him. To begin with, he taught me the difference between Abstract and Surrealist art. Then he introduced me to all the artists. They all adored him, and I was well received wherever I went. He planned shows for me and gave me lots of advice. I have him to thank for my introduction to the modern art world." Note that Peggy was careful to thank Duchamp publicly for introducing her to the modern art world.' (Dearborn, 2004, Loc 2578). Her gallery opened in January 1938, two weeks after the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* had opened in Paris. Duchamp did not go to the opening of his first big surrealist show as *generator-arbitrator* because he was preparing the hanging of Jean Cocteau's drawings for Peggy's Guggenheim Jeune's first vernissage in London. But, she did (indeed) go to Paris for the opening of the Surrealist show that she remarked had been mind-blowing (Dearborn, 2004). Her gallery was also a great success, Duchamp additionally organised there the first Kandinsky exhibition in England, but the enterprise lasted less than two years. By 1941, Peggy who was Jewish, had escaped from the Paris which was being occupied by the Nazis. She, her children, her ex-husband and husband to be Max Ernst went together to New York. When Duchamp arrived there, he lived in her triplex for a short period. Shortly after, he moved to a room in the apartment of the Romanian-Austrian architect Frederick Kiesler. The latter was responsible for designing Peggy's new gallery named *Art of This Century*, which opened in New York in October 1942 and that became famous for giving a new interpretation to the exhibition space. Describing this period in history serves to indicate that Duchamp also played an important role in commencing and establishing another important art collection in which he also worked as a curator preparing exhibitions. As Kachur indicates, there is still not enough evidence to corroborate the weight of Duchamp's influence on the *Art of This Century* gallery, but one can imagine that living with its main designer they probably exchange ideas.

show to become remarkable. He allegedly purchased 16 miles of white twine and knotted it at the corners, all across the ceiling, the temporary walls and doorway of the room, criss-crossing with lines the improvised gallery space. It was a gesture that, at the same time, partially hiding the architecture without covering it. Duchamp's set-up intervened in the space, distracting the viewer's vision from the extravagant architecture and directing it to the Surrealist artworks in the venue.

Once more, Duchamp's action that often is considered an installation, will be analysed here as a curatorial operation. Its definition still provokes debates in art history, so much so that the name of his manoeuvre has as yet not found a consensus. Naumann and Obalk (2000), for instance, designated it as a single artwork named *Sixteen Miles of String*, which is a reference to the claim made in the show's press release that considerably elongated its length. Years later Duchamp would deny this measurement saying it was a 'complete miscalculation', in fact it was not anywhere close to 16 miles, probably was not even one mile (Kachur, 2003, p.185). The same author refers to Duchamp's string as *Mile Twine*, but other authors such as John Vick in the article *A New Look: Marcel Duchamp, his twine, and the 1942 First Papers of Surrealism Exhibition* (n.d), utilizes *His Twine* as the title, which is as a matter of fact what Duchamp wrote in the show's catalogue. This thesis uses this title.

Following this thread, it is important to note, as Kachur indicates, that Duchamp was specifically requested to prepare the show. The idea for a beneficent event came from the fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli who was involved with the French charitable organization that had been occupying the building for one year. 'Schiaparelli recalled that it was Duchamp (and not Breton) whom she approached in the first place to organize a show "completely modern and *d'avant garde*"' (Kachur, 2003, p.172) Further evidence that Duchamp was in charge of the First Papers can be found in a letter to Man Ray in early October 1942 in which he wrote to his comrade: 'I'm taking care of the Surrealist Show which will be nothing like the Paris one.' (Kuenzli & Naumann, 1996, p.231).

First Papers comprised around 105 works not only by European artists but also a number of U.S citizens and also other names of the worldwide Surrealist movement such as the Mexican Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). Not all Europeans were seeking residence in the U.S. The British Henry Moore (1898-1986), Picasso and the Swiss Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) were among those who did not flee to New York. In total, 41 artists were invited to participate. In a kind of open call they were requested to send a list of artworks including a photo of a

new one. According to Kachur (2003), it implies that the artists' choices were a determining factor in the final selection of pieces on display. This procedure of a non-hierarchical selection seems to be an actual Duchampian move, repeating for instance the organizational procedure that he suggested for the Society of Independent Artists in 1917.

Another Duchampian touch would be the inclusion of emergent artists from the local scene that he had got to know from his friendship with Peggy Guggenheim and his old connections in the U.S. He persuaded Breton to loosen his control to include names that flirted with Surrealism but were not really related to the movement's nucleus. Kachur (2003) implied, for example, that Duchamp's strong commitment to the exhibition led him to visit artist's studios in New York as soon as he arrived in the city. Among the selected artworks Duchamp and Breton also included Native American objects. Most of the paintings were hung on mural partitions positioned perpendicular to the walls.

Returning to Duchamp's twine, some aspects attested to his understanding of the exhibition's space as a unit. He tied up the artworks. It is fair to point out that like so many exhibitions prepared with the effort of artists and curators but lacking institutional support, they did not have a large budget to spend on the endeavour. Thus, Duchamp's strategy throughout the exhibition was to choose a simple but shrewd element that would intertwine what the group of artworks wanted to propose. The art historian John Vick presents some interpretations of such a strategy:

In the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition, Duchamp's twine created an intriguing environment through an economy of means. Yet for all the simplicity of the installation's material, visitors were left uncertain of his twine's significance. As perhaps expected, the installation elicited a variety of interpretations. For Elsa Schiaparelli, one of the exhibition's coordinators, the twine was something of a guide, "directing visitors to this and that painting with a definite sense of contrast". Edward Alden Jewell, the *New York Times* art critic, focused on the installation's functional effects, reporting that, "[the twine] forever gets between you and the assembled art, and in so doing creates the most paradoxically clarifying barrier imaginable". Some visitors, such as Harriet and Sidney Janis, on the other hand, opted for more metaphorical interpretations. They believed the installation represented the complexity of understanding contemporary art, writing that Duchamp's use

of twine “symbolized literally the difficulties to be circumvented by the uninitiated in order to see, to perceive and understand, the exhibitions” (Vick, n.d., p.1)

Vick steered his research to prove that differently from what one may think when looking at the remaining photos of the exhibition, *His Twine* actually did not disturb the visitors’ movement. Perhaps, it in reality incited them to move around and try to see the paintings from diverse angles.

That Duchamp was keen to downplay, even deny, the obstructing quality of his twine is especially interesting, because that aspect has been the one most emphasized since *First Papers of Surrealism* closed on November 7, 1942. The installation has generally been discussed in terms of separation and dislocation; the twine deemed a dividing barrier, or what T.J. Demos calls “the maximal obstacle between paintings and viewing space.” This approach to the exhibition sets into motion a series of conflicts—installation versus paintings, paintings versus viewers, viewers versus installation—and has provided further opportunity to contextualize the exhibition within the political, social, and economic tensions of World War II. As Duchamp’s statements suggest, however, conflict was not the intended product of his twine. (Vick, n.d., p.2)

Vick refers to Duchamp’s statements quoted in Kachur (2003). More than a decade later, in 1953, questioned about *His Twine* and the hypothesis that it undermined the view of the artworks, Duchamp said: ‘It was nothing. You can always see through a window, through a curtain, thick or not thick, you can see always [all the way?] through if you want to, same thing there.’ (Kachur, 2003, p.183). Kachur also suggests that the material was a ‘careful choice’ like Duchamp’s glass and could even seem to be an obstacle to the ‘viewer physically’ but would always allow ‘optical penetration’ (Kachur, 2003, p.183). In turn, Vick refutes the ideas that made researchers believe that the intention in *His Twine*’s was somehow to impair the visitor’s experience. The art historian considers this issue a ‘misconception’. It received initial attention due the exaggerated measurement stated in the press release, the critics emphasised the string when writing about the show, however not always very enthusiastically and more often in a confused manner.

For example, Edward Alden Jewell a critic of New York Times, wrote a review of the show, under the long title *Inner Vision' and Out of Bounds: Sidelights and Afterthoughts on the Rise of the Surrealist School and Its Limitations—Other New Exhibition*. Here there is one excerpt:

The décor is phrased in just the unexpected from Marcel Duchamp, who has engagingly entangled this miniature Surrealist “pluriverse” in sixteen miles of innocent white string. No use trying in a matter-of-fact way to describe what he has accomplished. The net result, geometrical at least by implication, in its interlacing and festooning, is appropriately weird and devious. If forever gets between you and the assembled art, and in so doing creates the most paradoxically clarifying barriers imaginable. But if this ingenious investiture of Duchamp’s clarifies the present occasion by so pervasively enmeshing it in a shroud of irrational logic, it also helps make imperative one’s effort to determine just what Surrealism really is; how inclusive and to what extent exclusive is its empire; whether “inner vision” and diabolically serpentine wit are, ipso facto, interchangeable terms. (Jewell, 1942, cited in Altshuler, 2008, p.306).)

Moreover, decades later, this misinforming and misleading interpretation that *His Twine* was an obstacle gained strength due to O’Doherty’s *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. In this text the author accused Duchamp of failing to ‘acknowledge the other art around, which becomes wallpaper’ (O’Doherty, 1986, p.72). The author wanted to prove a point related to the exhibition space and used Duchamp as scapegoat. Nevertheless, as we have pointed out throughout this thesis, Duchamp guided his efforts towards the opposite direction that O’Doherty claims:

From the photographs, the string reconnoitered the space relentlessly, looping and tautening across each outcrop with demented persistence. It crisscrosses, changes speeds, recochets back from points of attachment, clusters in knots, wheels new sets of parallaxes with every step, parcelling up the space from the inside without the slightest formal worry. Yet it follows the alignment of the room and bays, erratically replicating ceiling and walls. No obliques plunge across the central space, which becomes fenced in, casually quoting the shape of the room. Despite the apparent tizzy of randomness, the room and what



is in it determine the string's peregrinations in an orderly enough way. The spectator is harassed. Every bit of space is marked Duchamp develops the modernist monad: the spectator in this gallery box. (O'Doherty, 1986, p.72)

In O'Doherty's opinion not only the spectator 'was harassed' by Duchamp gesture but also the artists. The author rhetorically asked 'not once but twice' why the other artists did not complain. He guessed the reason saying that 'Duchamp, I feel sure, was seen as someone who could generate attention. In delegating him to provide it, the artists were playing little Fausts to an amiable demon.' (1986, p.71). Contrarily to what O'Doherty feelings could lead us to believe, following a serious investigation there is no record of artists removing their paintings from the show. If they were that bothered, they could have done what Duchamp did with *Nude Descending a Staircase* in 1912, when he was not satisfied with the Puteaux group's demands. After all, it was a beneficent exhibition held in an improvised venue. None of the artists were obliged to take part in it. As we have seen, they knew from the outset that Duchamp was in charge of the whole organisation. As a matter of fact, Duchamp did not put up the cord alone. He had help from other artists. Alexander Calder, for example wanted to have papers pinned in an area of the web. But Kachur (2003) reported that as Breton disliked Calder's intervention, it ended up not taking place. Thus, as far as the truth about Duchamp's gesture is concerned, Vick's research demonstrated after an actual visit to the space that nowadays is a hotel, analysis of blueprints and interviewing people who actually were there (not only by looking at photos), that the real configuration of *His Twine* did not prevent the visitors from fully entering the space and circulating freely in the centre, if they wanted to. Vick found out that 'The interior of the gallery was also free of twine and thus open to ambulation.' (Vick, n.d., p.3). The web was produced in such manner that it did not obstruct the view. It actually added an extra, thin layer that prompted the artworks to be appreciated as a group:

But even if only a few visitors were "intrepid" enough to pass through the installation, the possibility for such passage is a reminder that his twine was far less an impediment than commonly believed. Moreover, for those who did not physically navigate the installation, his twine arguably did more to enhance the paintings on display than it did to obscure them. (Vick, n.d., p.6)

There was no consensus regarding His Twine like with almost all Duchamp's stances. He was used to pushing past the boundaries of the aesthetic experience. Differently from the 1938 Surrealist Exhibition, First Papers did not offer an immersive and sensorial environment to the visitor. This time the exhibition was set in a challenging milieu. The manner in which the venue was prepared would demand from the public more than a passive contemplative function. It obliged the visitors to really make a physical effort if they wanted to get the most out of the experience. In a very explicit manner, Duchamp reinforced the fact that the person who goes to an exhibition needs to be more than a viewer and become a participant. The project 'magic eyes' idealised but not achieved in 1938, was somehow modified and transformed into a single element that invited the visitor to pay attention to the relationship between sight and body. Filipovic confirms that: 'As in the 1938 Exposition, what was exhibited in 1942, in fact, was a rethinking of viewing in the typical space of exhibition and of the body's implication in that experience as much as the "art" itself.' (2008, p.90). In addition, Kachur upholds that the engendered curatorial operation brought a new experience with regard to the artworks to the public. The art historian highlights this perspective explaining how Duchamp genuinely and polemically brought about the desired experience:

Typically with Duchamp, a seemingly simple gesture unfolds into complex associations as well as thorny issues. [...] Yet the string does not negate the function of the eye: to see. Even in the densest webbing bridging the partitions, one could clearly still peer through to view the pictures in that aisle. [...] It is as if Duchamp wished to split the bodily experience of the spectator from the optical one. (Kachur, 2003, p.183).

Another interesting feature of the show that also manifested Duchamp's yearning as a curator to ignite the public's bodily experience, in addition to their sensorial experience, is the fact that he asked children to play ball during the opening. This also reinforces the evidence that people could access the centre of the gallery because kids needed space to play this game. They started at 20:00, as soon as the gallery opened its doors. As Kachur reports, Duchamp instructed the 11-year-old son of the art marchand Sidney Janis to be there with friends and freely play 'and not to cease if confronted by grownups.' (Kachur, 2003, p.195). If someone complained they were instructed to say that Mr. Duchamp had asked them to play there. Kachur also affirms that there is an account that some adults also joined the ludic activity. As Duchamp was not there

– he normally did not appear at openings – the children’s performance ‘was set in motion without any mechanism for it to stop.’ (Kachur, 2003, p.196). Kachur, decades later, collected testimonials from the children who had been there, and one said:

When we had all the huge rooms to ourselves and we started throwing balls. Just kept on through the whole evening and it got so crowded and we kept playing. Our instructions were to ignore everybody and just play to our heart’s content. We just loved it. (Kachur, 2003, p.195)

Through this narrative, one can imagine just how fun this (again) simple and far for unnoticeable performance was within the art show. Thus, this chapter concludes with this memory that highlights a well-known Duchampian characteristic: his sense of humour and his fervour to bring playful elements to the art world. In this case, he surprised the black-tie audience literally inserting these ludic aspects into the art exhibition.

Duchamp’s unusual and inquisitive exhibition installations for the Surrealist movement demonstrated an insistent questioning of how artworks occupy space, how they transform and are transformed by their context, and how they shift our perception. This legacy is vital to the theoretical frame of the thesis. It will be essential to understand the curatorial practices that we will present. The next chapter approaches the regeneration of the meaning of an artwork as the daily reality of the contemporary curatorial practices.

# **Chapter 3**

## **The legacy of Duchamp's curatorial practice**

In the first and second chapters, we laid out the social conditions that enabled the upsurge of the cultural conjuncture necessary for the emergence of an artistic and curatorial work like that of Duchamp. It is therefore this final chapter's task to present and analyse the legacy of Duchamp's curatorial practice.

It is important to bear in mind and emphasize from now on that this chapter is not intended to be a rigid guide to curatorial practices, which would undoubtedly go against Duchampian precepts. Our intention is to, based on the theories developed in the first chapter and the historical data collected and analysed in the second, identify how Duchamp influenced subsequent generations of artists, although this influence is not always explicit. Thus, we reaffirm Duchamp's importance as a central figure to contemporary art affecting current curatorial practices.

Besides the exhibitions that have already been addressed in the previous chapter, Duchamp continued to be responsible or partly responsible for the conception and organization of exhibition displays until the end of his life. There are, for example, additional contributions to the Surrealist movement, such as the 1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, the first great post-war gathering of surrealist artists in Europe at the Galerie Maeght, Paris (figure 81), that Duchamp was the curator of, once again in partnership with Breton. They were motivated by the architect Frederick Kiesler's design implementation that considered space as a malleable medium (Lind, 2016). For this curatorial project, they gave the artists a theme. In total, there were more than 200 works



Figure 81  
1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme at the Galerie Maeght, Paris

by circa 100 artists. They were supposed to create artworks related to the topic 'A New Myth'. To this end, the curators and architect divided the gallery into sectors, including a *Salle de Superstition* (Room of Superstitions) designed by Kiesler (figure 82), and the *Salle de Pluie* (Rain Room) (figure 83) where Duchamp exhibited *Le Chemin, l'ombre, trop longs, trop étroits* (1946) by the Brazilian Maria Martins (1894–1973).

Maria Martins was a printmaker and draughtswoman who moved to Europe when she was 22-years-old. In Europe, she completed her education in sculpture, which became her main artistic expression. She conceived organic and suggestive forms in bronze, usually with themes related to nature and at times inspired by Brazilian folklore characters and myths. In 1939, she moved to the USA. She met Duchamp in the 1940s and according to Tomkins (2005) they had an intense relationship, with Martins being the most significant lover that Duchamp had in his life. The Brazilian sculptress who created surrealistic metal creatures encouraged Duchamp to engage in his last masterpiece. Maria Martins literally became Duchamp's model from whom he shaped the female figure who would appear in *Étant Donnés*.

In the 1947 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, the *Salle de Pluie* was designed by Duchamp, who put all his efforts into making it rain on the exhibition space, above the large bronze sculpture (150 × 203 × 54 cm) made by Maria Martins:

Duchamp let it rain directly on the sculpture group, the water drained away in the sculpture's base, a tub filled with earth that was supposed to let grass grow – a symbol for renewal. The physical sensation of the rain should finally wake up the visitors from their semi-consciousness and lead to an activation of their senses. (Kraus, 2013, no pagination)

This exhibition was also noteworthy for having a path that led the visitor through different types of ritualistic phases, lending a certain notion of mysticism but also adding a dose of ironic criticism. It ended in the section named *Le Dédale*, a type of maze created by Duchamp with 13 commissioned 'altars' made by the participant artists using Surrealist objects or paintings that could be, for example, a representation of an imaginary magical animal or the portrait of one of the artists as a tarot's archetype. This was also the exhibition in which Duchamp produced a catalogue on whose cover, as Kuczyńska (2014) reminds us, he wrote a note that is exactly the contrary of many warnings that one customarily finds inside museums: 'Please, touch' (figures 84 and 85). Duchamp



Figure 82  
 Room of Superstitions  
 1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme at the Galerie Maeght, Paris



made a print of a female breast to be the cover's illustration, but for the luxury edition of the catalogue, 999 copies were prepared featuring a three-dimensional, hand-painted foam rubber breast on the front wrapped in black velvet.

Creating the exhibition as a narrative path and conceiving it as an initiation of the viewer was a particularly ingenious idea. Duchamp created milestones in the theory of art with his exploration of perception and his study of the recipient. His 'rain' of 1947 was a climax in visitor interaction. His kitchen, planned but never built, would have added the sense of taste at least to the sensory experience. Kiesler knew how to use the exhibition as an instrument for developing a programmatic architecture. He succeeded in achieving a coherent exhibition design with specially conceived rooms and works as a symbiosis of form and content. (Kraus, 2013, no pagination)

Besides his work alongside Breton setting up Surrealist exhibitions, Duchamp enjoyed making small displays for bookshops, such as Gotham Book Mart in 1945 (figure 86), but he also worked diligently as a consultant and manager of important collections as we have mentioned before: Peggy Guggenheim, the Arensbergs and Dreier for instance. In addition to that, towards the end of his life he closely accompanied the assembly of retrospective exhibitions dedicated to him, for example the first one-man show he had, *By Or Of Marcel Duchamp Or Rrose Sélavy*, at the Art Museum, Pasadena, USA, in 1963. Later, in 1966, when he talked about this show he offered a brief outlook on his understanding of the transitive nature of the artwork and the importance of the viewer:

My first one-man show was two years ago in Pasadena when I was 75 years old. Even then, it wasn't very important. But then, what is important to the onlooker now is always changed, by the second onlooker twenty-five or seventy-five years from now. [...] An oeuvre by itself doesn't exist, it's an optical illusion. It's only made to be seen by the people who look at it. The poor medium is only gratuitous. You could invent a false artist. Whatever happens could have been completely different. Look at those poor things from Africa (pointing to the African and pre-Columbian sculptures, so important in our lives. We've made modern art of them. (Duchamp cited in Ashton, 1966, p.246)

In this long list of exhibitions, what can be observed is that in his work as a curator there is no ready-made formula, a method that is repeated in the plac-



Figure 83  
Rain Room  
1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme at the Galerie Maeght, Paris



Figure 84  
Please Touch  
Cover of 1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme catalogue

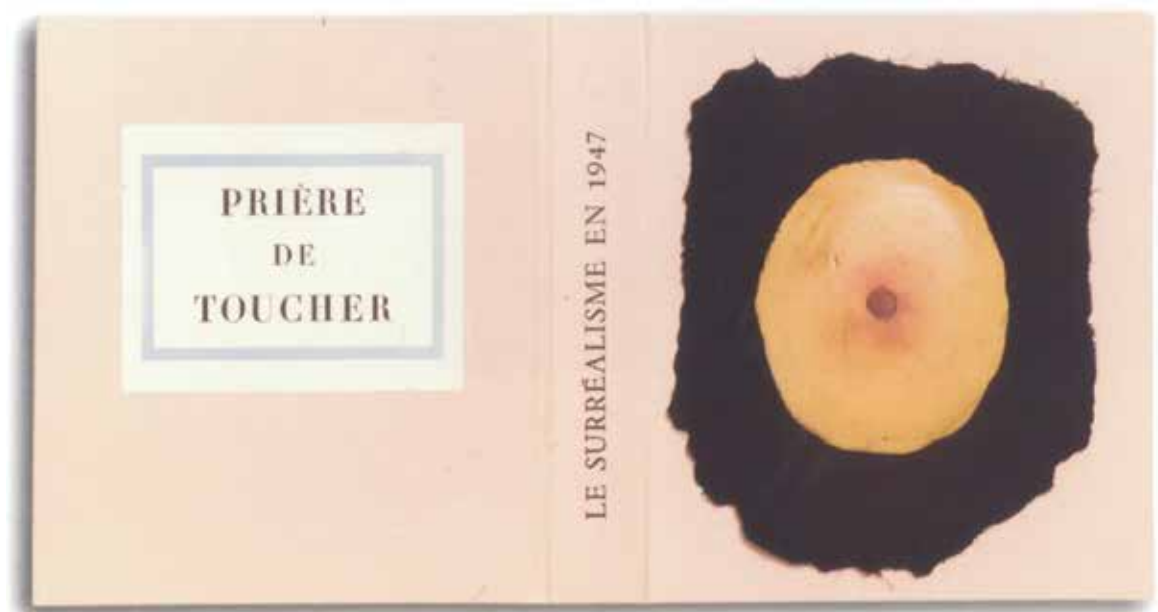


Figure 85  
Please Touch  
Cover of 1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme catalogue



Figure 86  
Gotham Book Mart in 1945

ing of the works, but rather a readymade principle that pervades all the exhibitions that he organized. What is common to them all is the pronounced sensitivity to the artistic coefficient of each work, its peculiarities and how it is conjugated in the exhibition space. Up to this point of the thesis, we have analysed collective expositions where Duchamp's curatorial approach was evidenced by the plurality of artistic projects by several artists grouped to create a common and shared experience. Notwithstanding, having reached the end of this study we will consider a solo exhibition to delineate a typical Duchampian manoeuvre.

Out of all Duchamp's achievements as a curator, in this last chapter we shall consider as a paradigm what Filipovic (2008) called the last curatorship of Duchamp: *Étant Donnés*: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage. [Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *Illuminating Gas*]. We will also look at the artist's own set of works that he himself curated in the vicinity of the room where he assigned the assembly of *Étant Donnés* (figures 5 and 6). This was the installation that Duchamp kept secret for about 20 years and was only shown to the public after the artist's death on October 2, 1968.

Duchamp began creating *Étant Donnés* in 1946 on the top floor of the building where he had a studio in New York, and not even his closest friends knew of the existence of this room where he was constantly working on the making of what would be a posthumous display. Filipovic's remark precisely about this work is that 'from the grave, Duchamp curated one last show.' (Filipovic, 2008, p.98). Duchamp finished the work in 1966 and made sure that once again he would not be present for the opening of an exhibition curated by himself (as was his custom). Already at an advanced age, he kept the work hidden and left an instruction manual so that his wife Alexina Duchamp and stepson Paul Matisse would set up *Étant Donnés* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art where he had already put on display his artworks owned by the Arensbergs. *Étant Donnés* finally opened to the public in July 1969, a few months after his death in October 1968.

*Étant Donnés* consists of a room that springs from the last exhibition gallery of Duchamp's works in the museum, for whose installation he was personally responsible. On entering the room there are no paintings on the walls and no objects on any plinths, just a sisal rug on the floor and an arched brick doorway framing an old door set into one of the walls. But it is not any old door, it bears no resemblance to any other door that opens pathways in the Philadelphia museum. It is a forgotten door made of old wood, appearing to have been a constituent part of any building in ruins. When the visitor thinks s/he has reached

the end of the line, a dead end, s/he notices tiny holes through which s/he can observe what lies beyond the door. As the visitor approaches and positions him/herself to be able to see, the image is impressive: a naked female body lying on grass and dry branches, with her arm raised, holding a lamp. Behind this idyllic-surreal image, a waterfall flows.

The manner in which *Étant Donnés* unfolded itself toward the public's experience in an exhibition space will be studied further here. This piece was conceived for a specific site and to be the wrap-up of an exhibition of Duchamp's own creations. We will examine how some of the features of Duchamp's last work permeated his oeuvre and curatorial thinking and how it is highly influential on contemporary curatorial challenges.

The questions raised by post-Duchampian art are clearly manifested in the realm of cultural displacement. For this reason, this study has selected for this chapter in which we bring the curatorial practice initiated by Duchamp to the present moment, two important names of contemporary art whose artworks are impregnated with issues related to contextualization. They are the Brazilian artists Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles. Their trajectories, that overlapped at a certain period, are a fertile terrain to comprehend the intrinsic characteristics of post-Duchampian art and its encounter with the most diverse public. Coincidentally both Oiticica and Meireles had solo retrospectives at the Tate Modern in London. The recent readings and interpretations that both events brought about will be analysed as substantial case studies of curatorial counterpoints.

### **3.1 ÉTANT DONNÉS: CURATORIAL TESTAMENT**

*Étant Donnés* holds a clear connection with the place where it was set up. It is often considered one of the most pivotal site-specific artworks in 20<sup>th</sup>-century art (Taylor & Lins, 2009). Curiously though, differently from other installations of its kind, the artist Duchamp was not alive when the artwork's last and permanent assembly was finally ready. Duchamp left a manual of instructions to guide his family on how to move the artwork from his secret studio in New York to where it would be located at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA). However, perhaps not from its inception but throughout its production, Duchamp designed *Étant Donnés* having in mind the last gallery room of the part of the museum dedicated to his oeuvre. This gesture or this lack of an actual gesture, as he was not there to assemble it, is a self-contradictory fact that involves his last artwork, which

places Duchamp again in the position of someone whom even in a posthumous action pushes the paradoxical boundaries of art terms using his artistic practice. Consequently, the act of erecting *Étant Donnés* without the artist's presence is a condition that leaves us room to interpret *Étant Donnés* – Duchamp's artistic testament, as Judovitz remarks (1996) – as a project of curatorial endeavour instead of merely as a site-specific artwork.

One can see through its Manual of Instructions (a facsimile was re-published in 2009, figures 87 to 89) that Duchamp had recorded all the steps for its assembly. In an in-depth examination of the book, one can find curatorial thinking behind the structure and specifications that he documented there. It is very different, for example, from the notes that he left in the *Green Box* that present themselves as a type of artistic 'Rosetta Stone' to decipher the elements that composed the *Large Glass* and Duchamp's curatorial practice. The text written by Duchamp in *Étant Donnés*' manual of instructions does not create an opening for a poetic or abstract elucidation.

They are a set of clear commands that combined can definitely be considered a museographic guide, including illustrative photographs for the work's design, all the elements that it should contain, how people should handle each of its components and the importance of its positioning. It is not a puzzle like the other notations left by Duchamp, it is very specific and straightforward. The only excerpt that resembles the typical Duchampian enigmatic writing style can be found at the beginning of the manual of instructions where we read: 'Dismountable approximation, executed between 1946 and 1966 in N.Y. (by approximation I mean that there is a margin of *ad libitum* in taking apart and putting together again)', (Duchamp, 2009, p.iii.). Regarding this quotation and the book itself, Anne d' Harnoncourt wrote in the facsimile's preface:

*Étant Donnés* is described on the title page of the notebook as an *approximation démontable*, a nearly untranslatable phrase that suggests a work to be taken apart and then reconstructed according to Duchamp's detailed operations, which allowed for 'a margin of *ad libitum* in the taking apart and putting together again.' Despite this promise of flexibility, the pragmatic manual actually contains extremely specific instructions – right down to the wattage of the light bulbs – that allow for very little margin of error in the construction of the ocular illusion. In fact, the only two places where Duchamp allowed a modicum of free-



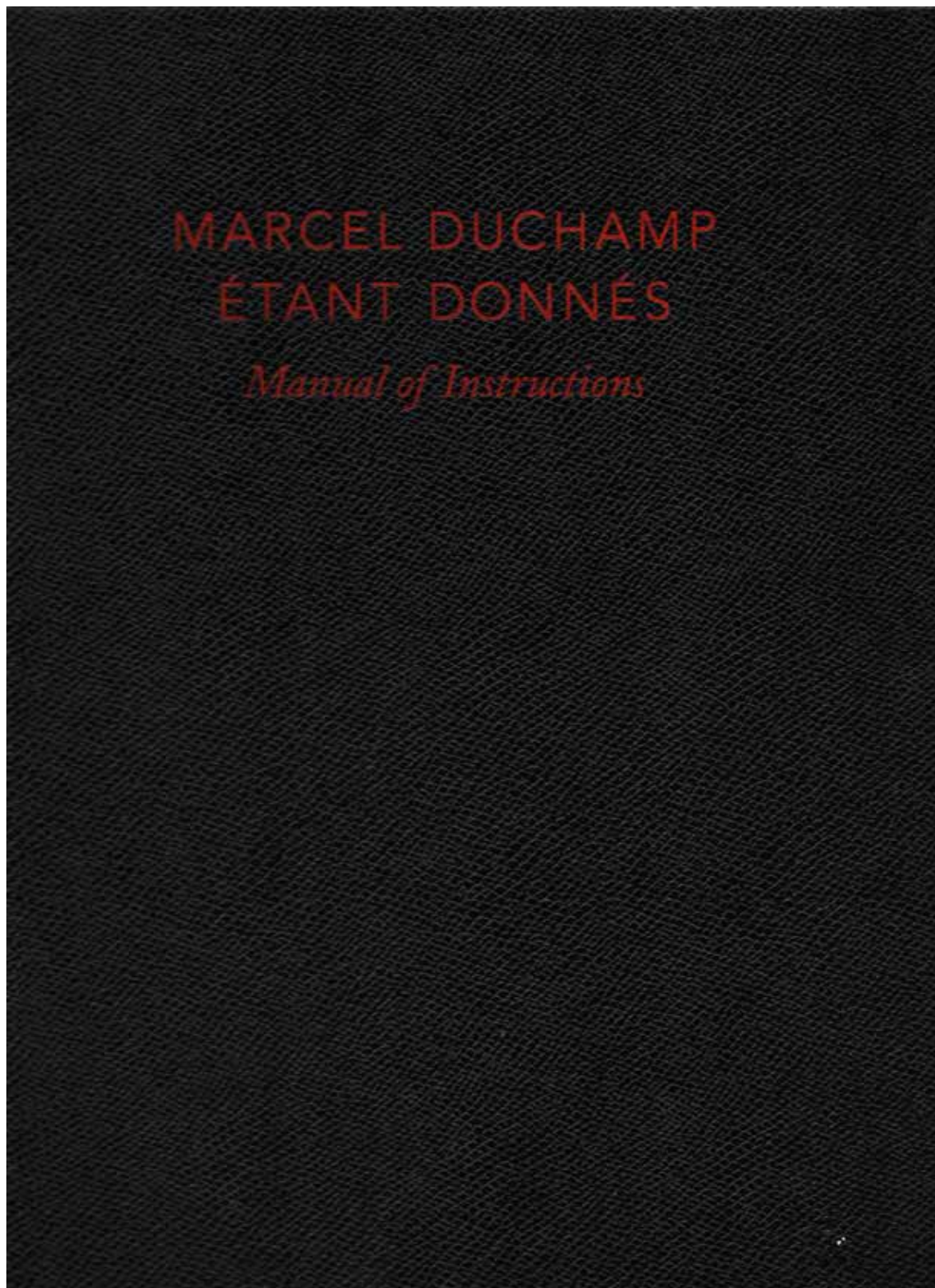


Figure 87  
Cover of *Étant Donnés: Manual of Instructions*

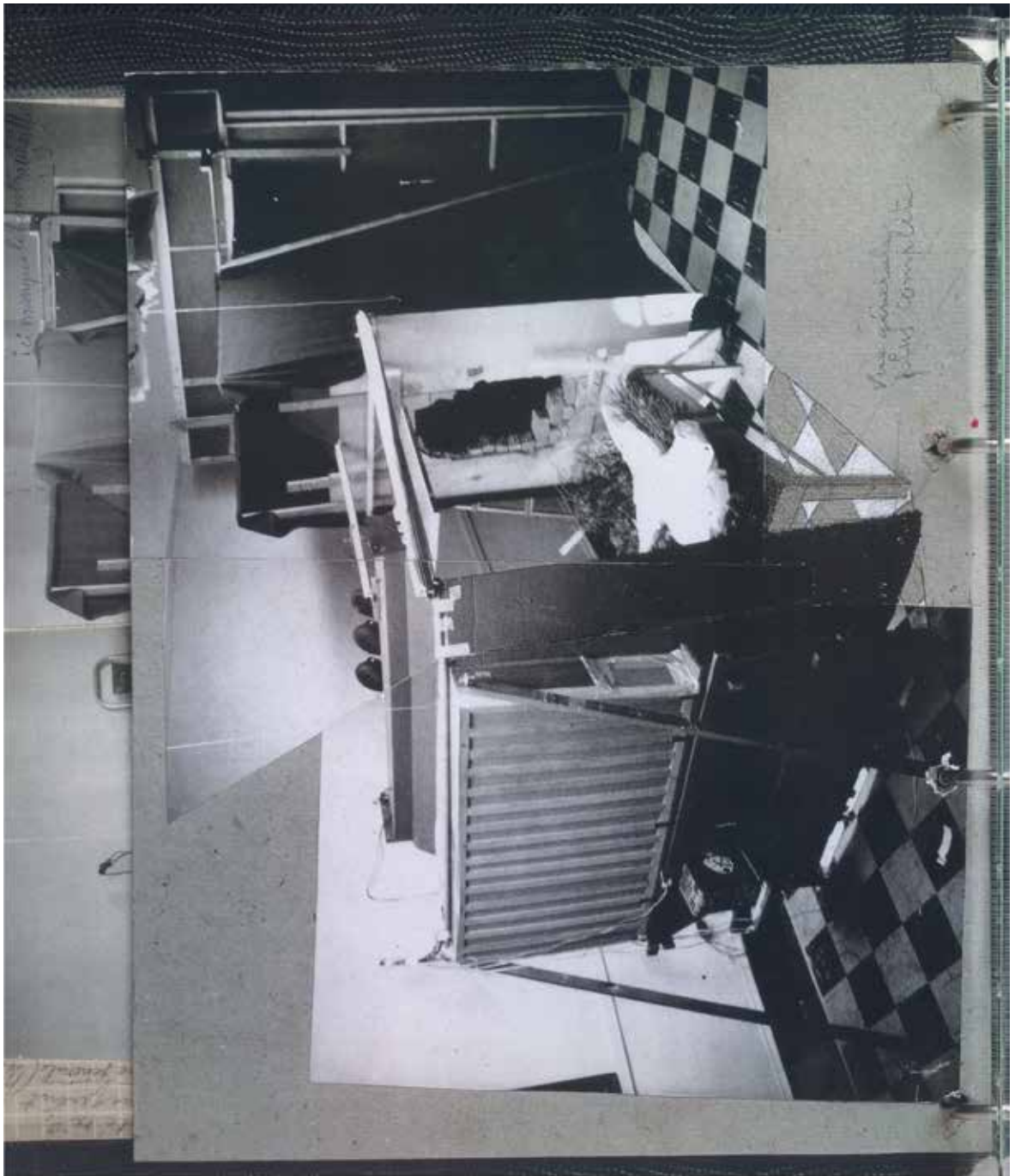


Figure 88  
Inside page of *Étant Donnés: Manual of Instructions*

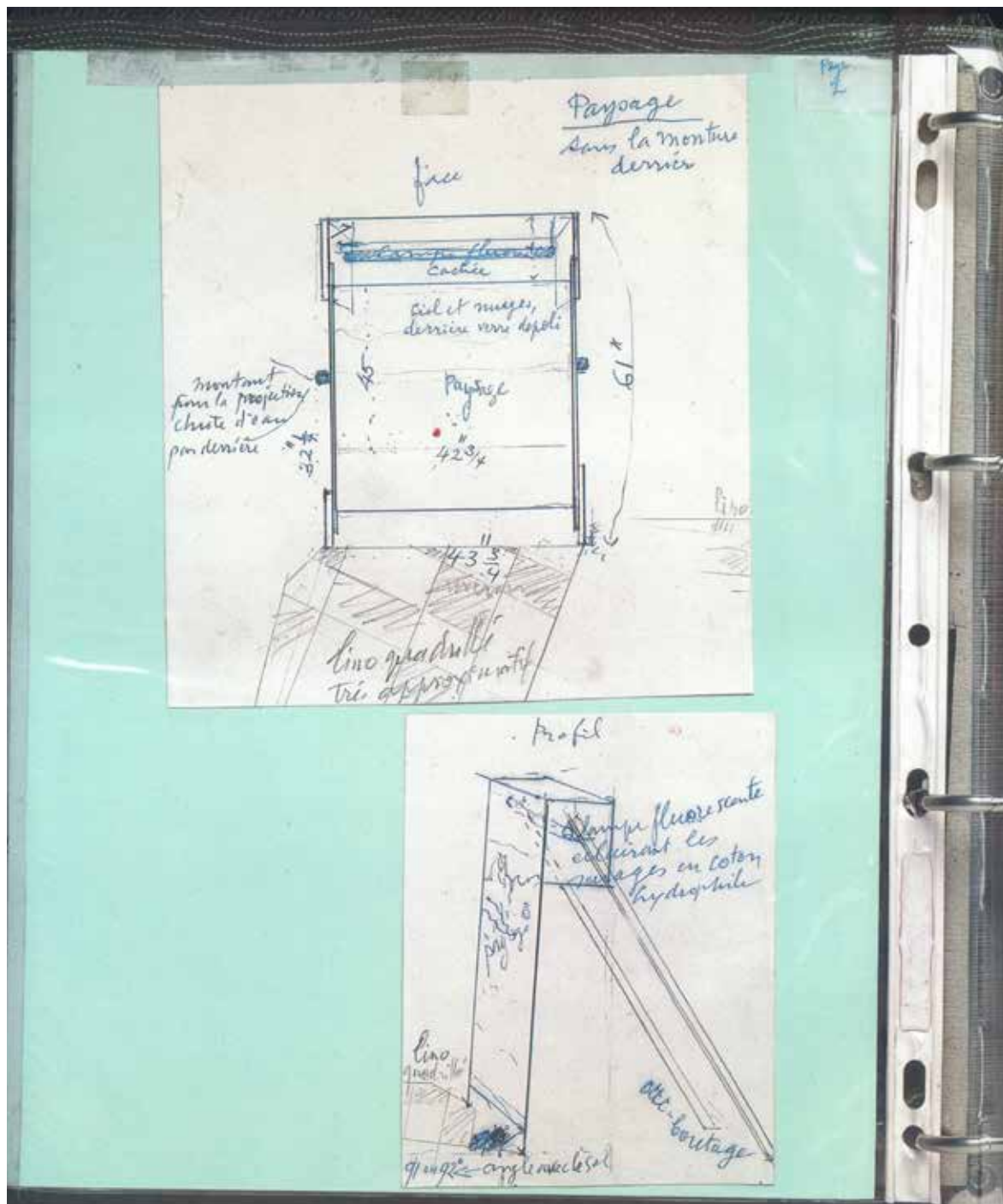


Figure 89  
Inside page of Étant Donnés: Manual of Instructions

dom were in the position of the cotton clouds in the sky, which ‘can be changed at will’ (page 4) and the brilliance of the cascading waterfall (page 49), which is also adjustable. (D’Harnoncourt, 2009, p.v)

Thus, rather than focus our reading on the figurative indices and symbols or the very precise or improvised material utilized to compose the piece and which are still there today, it is important to investigate how the museum was chosen and how crucial Duchamp’s role was in selecting this particular institution to have *Étant Donnés* on display after his death.

Louise and Walter Arensberg took years to reach the decision regarding the institution to which they should donate their collection of circa 1000 pieces, from pre-Columbian and African sculptures to exactly 216 works of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, ‘Its chief emphasis is laid on the pioneering works of the leading creators of modern art, precisely in its great moment of 1907 to 1911 or 1914.’ (Kimball, 1954, p.5). This highly representative gathering of modern art included 28 paintings by Picasso, 19 artworks by Brancusi and 19 by Klee, among many others like Miró, Mondrian or Kandinsky that Duchamp himself, as the main collection advisor, assisted during decades in acquiring. It was not by chance that the Arensbergs’ collection was the largest and most significant collection containing Duchamp’s artworks, totalizing 37 (Tomkins, 2005). Consequently, Duchamp more than anyone else was interested in supervising where the collection would go, since that choice would be also crucial for the future of *Étant Donnés*.

The question regarding which institution would receive the Arensbergs’ collection was answered in December 1950 when the couple confirmed and signed an agreement with the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA). According to Tomkins (2005), more than 20 first-class art or educational institutions (such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, Harvard University, the National Gallery in Washington or Stanford University) approached the collectors offering a place for them to bequeath their artworks. This happened after the Arensbergs nullified a previous offer of donation made to the University of California because the university did not put up a new building for the display as promised. The Arensbergs cared deeply about the collection’s diversified nature and wanted to secure a permanent house where the different pieces could be exhibited together. For this reason, they established very demanding requirements, such as for example that the host institution should keep the collection untouched for 25 years, which meant not selling or removing a large part of these works from the public permanent display during this time. Consequently, only a



few institutions would qualify to receive it or be keen to undertake major modifications to accommodate all the works on their premises. The strongest candidate was the Art Institute of Chicago, but during the negotiation the museum's curators organized a temporary exhibition of the collection in October 1949 that unfortunately did not satisfy its owners. One of the reasons is that they did not like the arrangement where sculptures and paintings were placed separately. Thus, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, that was an outsider in the 'competition', won the battle for the collection and their secret weapon was to rely on Duchamp as the curator, giving him the freedom to organise the display.

However, to reach this conclusive decision, there had previously been a long and complex discussion which began a few years earlier and in which Duchamp acted as the main mediator (Tomkins, 2005). He and Fiske Kimball, the director of the PMA (from 1925 to 1955), extensively debated all the minor details of the donation. From the exchange of letters (Naumann & Obalk, 2000), in which one can read the advice and recommendations that Duchamp, in today's terms as the collection's curator, gave to the patrons, it becomes apparent that he was unequivocally the decision-maker of the situation.

From 1949 to 1950, when the conversation with the PMA intensified, the artist was still working on the dummy model, and although he premeditated that he would include a landscape and waterfall (which at this point was motionless), the piece was at that time like a relief arising out of a two-dimensional plane. This information is provided by Ramírez (1998) who scrutinized Duchamp's last creation in the book *Duchamp: love and death, even* and produced a table with a 'hypothetical chronology' of the making of *Étant Donnés* (Ramírez, 1998, p. 244). Following this table, the whole concept of a three-dimensional tableau was still far from being defined. This scenography would be decided upon at a later stage, when, one can speculate, the artist knew where, in which gallery space, of which institution, the artwork would remain permanently. Thus, it means that in the first letter that Duchamp wrote to the Arensbergs mentioning Kimball dated 8 May 1949 (Naumann & Obalk 2000, p.269), he was already in the first years of making *Étant Donnés*, and probably still working on the sketches (figure 90) and casts that he made having Maria Martins as his sitter<sup>55</sup> (Tomkins, 2005 and Nau-

55 The first drawing dates from 1947 and is titled *Étant donnés: Maria, la chute d'eau et le gaz d'éclairage*. Duchamp would subsequently make other works using Maria Martins as model, works that certainly generated the female body of *Étant Donnés* and other artworks with an erotic connotation. The other piece unquestionably connected to *Étant Donnés* is a female figure composed of painted leather on plaster and velvet from 1949 which bears the inscription: 'Cette dame appartient à Maria Martins / avec toutes mes affections / Marcel Duchamp 1948/49' (Tomkins, 2005).

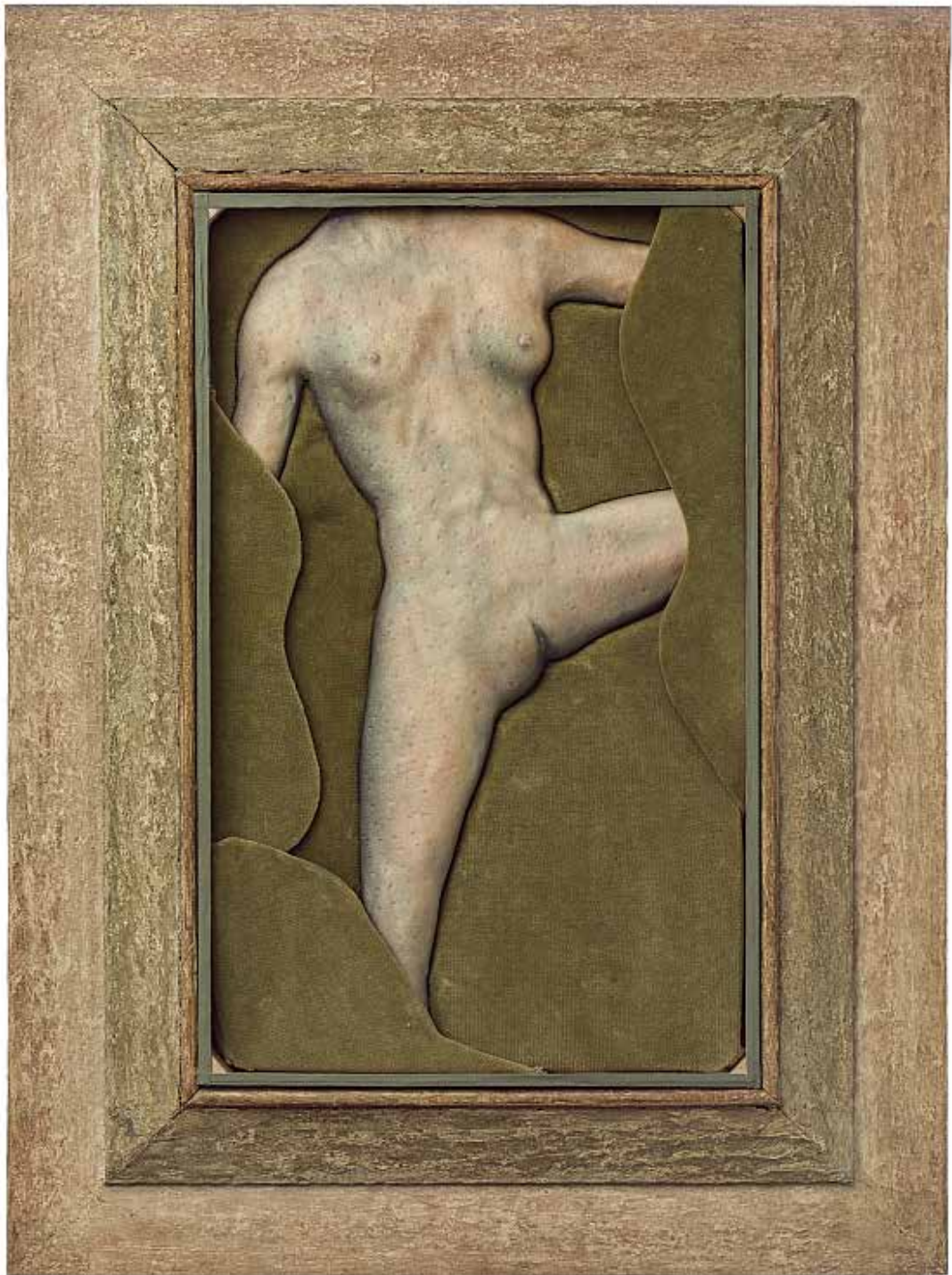


Figure 90  
Étant Donnés: 1 ° la chute d'eau, 2 ° le gaz d'éclairage,  
Duchamp, M. (1948/1949)  
Cuir peint sur relief en plâtre, monté sur velours  
50 x 31cm  
Stockholm, Moderna Museet.

mann, 2012). This can be assumed since the first drawing dates from 1947 and is titled *Étant donnés: Maria, la chute d'eau et le gaz d'éclairage*. Duchamp would subsequently make other artworks using Maria Martins as his model, works that certainly generated the female body of *Étant Donnés* and other artworks with an erotic connotation. The other piece unquestionably connected to *Étant Donnés* is a female figure composed of painted leather on plaster and velvet from 1949 which bears the inscription: 'Cette dame appartient a Maria Martins / avec toutes mes affections / Marcel Duchamp 1948/49' (Tomkins, 2005, p.235).

Thus, this letter from 8 May 1949 (Naumann & Obalk 2000, p.269) is important because there Duchamp reported to the Arensbergs on his visit to the PMA, which was the first inspection of the space that would receive the patrons' collection. Attached to the letter, he sent a drawing similar to a blueprint paying meticulous attention to the exhibition areas, what they were at that time and what he, Duchamp planned for them. He also wrote bullet points including 'Area Offered', 'Windows', 'First and Second Floor', 'Flooring', among other topics. Regarding this last one, for example, Duchamp indicated that the director said that they could later put any kind of flooring they wanted (Naumann & Obalk, 2000). He also implied that the collection owners should advocate for a change of what would be present in the adjoining rooms next to their collection's gallery. As a good negotiator, not only on this occasion but also during the whole transaction discussion, he sometimes forwarded his most drastic demands to the couple and suggested that the Arensbergs themselves ask for them.

Duchamp did not hold back when making requests to ensure the visibility and constitution of a comprehensive exhibition. One of his suggestions to Kimball, for example, was the opening of passageways. He requested the production of a scale model to provide the Arensbergs with a 'miniature hanging of the whole collection' to get 'an accurate preview of the show' and he kindly asked Kimball if he was not 'too impressed with the "theme of symmetry" in hanging pictures, and that a "gentle disorder" would be preferable to a geometric "balancing" in the disposition of the paintings.' (Duchamp in Naumann & Obalk, 2000, p.297).

Their written correspondence demonstrates his curatorial concerns and more than this, just how much Duchamp wished to modify the whole museum to be analogue to his beliefs, as he said to the Arensbergs: 'The difficulty will be how to divide the space offered so that it does not look like an ordinary museum collection' (Duchamp in Naumann & Obalk, 2000, p.271). The conversation



between Duchamp and Kimball did not end after the news that the Arensbergs had closed the deal with the PMA. Duchamp continued with the arrangements to make sure that all the terms of the transaction were fulfilled.

Another three years went by from the donation decision until the inauguration of the Arensbergs' collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. While proceedings were going on, misfortunes happened. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Dreier died in March 1952 and Duchamp, as the executor of her will and collection, arranged for the *Large Glass* to be transferred to the PMA, a desire that she had expressed before her death, in order for this seminal piece to be together with Duchamp's other important artworks. Additionally, the Arensbergs wished for the opening of their display at the PMA to be solely devoted to their collection without artworks from other owners<sup>56</sup>. Duchamp negotiated programming different openings, a great opening only for the Arensberg's display and another later, where the *Large Glass* would be included. From the nature of their correspondence regarding the opening we can observe a very patient Duchamp trying to do his best to attend his patrons' wishes and willing to wait to have his plans put into effect by the museum's administration, as we can see in this letter to the Arensbergs from 29 October 1953:

I was in Philadelphia again, two days ago and I saw the rooms prepared for the collection. They are completely finished except for some details in the electric lighting and they are beautiful, white, clear. The 3 large rooms (two with daylight) are connected by several doors and the long mezzanine adds a great deal of space for hanging. Also the outdoor terrace with a door from one of the rooms gives a pleasant feeling to the whole arrangement. I asked Kimball when he expected to have the grand opening, he was completely non-committal. What is your feeling and have you any ideas you want to me to give them. It seems that until March they have other large exhibitions. But I think March could be a good time even if you don't want to send everything. Kimball tells me that Lou is home and feels better. This is good news. But let me hear directly from you and tell me if I should undertake anything with the Philadelphians. (Duchamp in Naumann & Obalk, 2000, p.328).

However, the long delay continued and unfortunately Louise Arensberg died in November 1953. No matter how hard Duchamp tried to speed up the arrangements in the museum to have the artworks ready, since he suspected

that life would be hard for Walter Arensberg without his life companion<sup>57</sup>, the gentleman did not survive long enough to see his collection exhibited. He passed away a few months after his wife in January 1954. Hence with these sad losses, Duchamp, who wanted to have the exhibition opened before the summer, only finally inaugurated the Arensbergs' collection at the PMA in October 1954.

Nevertheless, as every cloud has a silver lining, the death of his collectors enabled Duchamp to work with extra freedom on the curatorial project of what would turn out to be the most comprehensive survey of his oeuvre. He managed to include the *Large Glass* together with the Arensbergs' pieces as a permanent display, something that if they (Dreier and the Arensbergs) had still been alive would probably have led to certain battle of egos, as one of the conditions imposed by Arensberg was that the collection's opening would not be associated with anything else. We can read a description of how Duchamp's section was complete in this quote from Kimball's 1954 essay dedicated to the new display in the museum (figures 91 to 96):

The Arensberg Collection stresses above all the rare works of Marcel Duchamp of 1911 onward, even several before this, and the sculpture of Constantin Brancusi, which from about 1910 made such a complete break and antithesis with that of Rodin, Bourdelle, and Maillol. There are no less than thirty Duchamps: the realistic, such as the early portraits; transitional, such as the older *Chess Players* and *The Sonata*; cubist, including all three versions of the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1912 (the *succès de scandale* of the Armory Show in 1913). *The King and Queen*, 1912, *The Bride*, 1912; and later several of the 'readymades'. Most important of all is his 'big glass', which Duchamp has called 'the principal work of my life'. (Kimball, 1954, p.6)

As we can grasp from this explanation, Duchamp did not hang his works isolated from other artists. It was the Arensbergs' desire not to disperse the Pre-Columbian or other ancient non-Western culture pieces from his modern artworks. As Kimball mentioned they were 'shown as art, not as archaeology

57 In 3 December 1953, Duchamp wrote to Walter Arensberg: 'But you Walter have to face a new reality and do you want to face it? [...] All these questions remain unanswered when they are formulated in words like these. The answer must come of itself, unformulated, by breathing again for her and give the final form to the work that she and you started together. [...] I really hoped that there might be enough time to open the rooms in Philadelphia and let her know that one of her dreams had become a reality. [...] I don't expect you to write for some time: Words are too much of a *passe-partout* approximation and never carry the subtleties of our thoughts. All I want you to know is that I think of Lou and you.' (Naumann & Obalk, 2000, pp.330-331).



Figure 91  
Arensbergs' collection at the PMA in October 1954



Figure 92  
Arensbergs' collection at the PMA in October 1954



Figure 93  
Arensbergs' collection at the PMA in October 1954



Figure 94  
Arensbergs' collection at the PMA in October 1954





Figure 95  
Arensbergs' collection at the PMA in October 1954



Figure 96  
Arensbergs' collection at the PMA in October 1954

or ethnology' and some were 'mingled with paintings' (Kimball, 1954, p.12). This is a Duchampian curatorial strategy that we have already seen, for example, in 1942 *First Papers of Surrealism*. What Duchamp did, playing the role of a regular museum curator – as suggested by Filipovic (2008) – was to create an environment in which the visitor would see the unfolding of his ideas. As a curator he conveyed them to the public, creating a narrative that leads to a greater understanding of his thoughts within the context of Modern Art (showing also other artists) but highlighting his own singularities when compared to his peers. We also can observe when looking at the pictures of the display that there were sections where one can indeed find a concentration of Duchamp's works together.

In the photographs, we can identify that one version of the *Nude* is placed alongside two different versions of the *Chocolate Grinder*. It is also interesting to see the *Large Glass* in the middle of a room, being literally the centre of attention, and in the background there are paintings that although unidentified can be speculated as originating from the De Stijl movement. This was an arrangement similar to the one Duchamp created the first time that the *Large Glass* was on public view in the Brooklyn Museum in 1926. It is also important to point out that although Duchamp did not completely subvert the museum space as he had done in previous curatorships, he was far from producing any type of 'white cube' museum design, even taking into account that he was working for an institutional exhibition, as Kimball informs us:

The treatment of the galleries is not specifically 'modern', but in character with the generally classical architecture of the building, simplified. The large central galleries each a 'Tribune', are of simple geometrical spatial form, entirely without ornament; respectively domed and cross vaulted. A delightful feature is the balcony toward the great courtyard, from which a door opens the Arensberg collection, giving a touch of the open air and a view over the rich plantations of azalea and paulownia, with their own elements of modern sculpture. (Kimball, 1954, pp.12-14)

Duchamp was already predicting a subversion of museums' structures with the displacement of his last artwork from its secret location to his own exhibition survey after his death. Thus, the visitor to the Philadelphia Museum of Art could see the growth of Duchamp's interest in motion, time, machinery, his statement against retinal paintings, his revolutionary readymades, and the congrega-

tion of these topics in the *Large Glass*, everything organised by him, and from 1969 onwards the visitor would also see the piece that would fuse all these thoughts:

Measured with precision and drawn to scale, the plans include the famous galleries where the Duchamp works are held to this day and the small adjacent room, measured and marked as well, in which, unknown to anyone then, the *Étant Donnés* would be housed just over a decade later (unknown, yes, but it is striking that Duchamp knew this space as well as he did—with an architect's precision—one can't help speculate that in his final years, he worked on his construction with exactly that space in mind). The Arensberg collection was installed in 1954 with Duchamp directing the placement of each of the works – a regular museum curator, you might say. (Filipovic, 2008, p. 97)

The encounter with *Étant Donnés* is a unique event in which the curator brings an experience to the public that destabilizes what one expects from an art exhibition. If Duchamp wanted to go against retinal art, making it give way to the intellect, in an exhibition of his works the observer's mind process can run at millions of revolutions per minute and s/he can employ other senses in addition to sight. Duchamp's curatorship of his own work brought forth in the exhibition space an environment conducive to awakening an awareness of the essential issues of language and perception of the world that Duchamp made evident with his art. Therefore, nothing could be more appropriate than, at the end of this profusion of experiences which is a tour of the Duchampian world with its voluptuous ideas and unfoldments, the visitor reaching the end of the exhibition and coming across an empty room. Having previously been faced with all this expository experience, it is at this moment that Duchamp, in an unoccupied space of the museum, leads us to a place that breathes and allows us to breathe.

Even nowadays, already knowing what to expect from the display at the Philadelphia Museum (currently Duchamp's artworks are more concentrated, no longer in conversation with pieces by other artists) and aware that at the end of the walk through the exhibition, there will be a rendezvous with *Étant Donnés*, there is still an element of astonishment. In the museum's current configuration, it is as if the temporal manipulation that occurs in the *Nude Descending the Staircase*, an elongated yet pictorially eternalized time span, continues in the exhibition space at each encounter with an artwork, until that instant of time is ruptured in the final installation.



In the empty room, whose only element is a sisal rug and a door, the confrontation with the unexpected causes surprise and apprehension. It is easy to agree with the scholars Judovitz (1996) and Naumann (2012) that the urge to approach the door is not something magnetic. And indeed, there is a restlessness, a curiosity but also a self-awareness in the visitor to know how to act. What is the observer's role within an art exhibition? What is one allowed or forbidden to do? Duchamp explicitly questions here the issue of the public's meeting with the artwork as described in his already aforementioned lecture *Creative Act* (1957), when Duchamp argues that the artist is no longer alone in allowing art to gain the world, that the creative act is not performed only by the artist, but that:

it acquires another aspect when the spectator experiences the phenomenon of transmutation: through the change from inert matter into an artwork of art is when true transubstantiation occurs, and the viewer's role is to determine the weight of the work on the aesthetic scale.' (Duchamp, 2005, p. 518 - 519)

Thus, one who reaches *Étant Donnés* is actually impelled to act, to take action, however not before apprehending the whole given situation.

Rather than being 'magnetically' (Golding) attracted by the door, the first-time observer has trouble identifying the room as a site for art, since an underlit room does not correspond to our expectation of what constitutes display in a museum. The darkened room, upon which we stumble as if by accident, is often disregarded, despite the label of a work not visible within its confines. The only thing that can draw us into the room is the image of other spectators like us, looking. Their look initiates us into the possible experience of looking at that which others deem worthy of looking at, those who have been initiated. Conspiratorially, we join them, since after all we are intended to look in a museum. Unless the viewer is already initiated, 'ready-made' by the discourse of the museum, s/he risks missing out entirely on the experience, intoxicated as one is with visibility, the conviction that the museum is the archive for the consumption of monuments. (Judovitz, 1996, p. 185 - 186)

Judovitz's description elaborates on the experience that one can have once in front of *Étant Donnés* – or its translated title *Given* – but as we have seen during the development of this thesis, what one expects to find in a museum is ex-

actly what Duchamp revolutionised with his curatorial practice. Judovitz (1996) also affirmed that the image that one discovers through the peepholes is a statement that confronts the act of merely looking. At long last, the visitor has to act and bring her/himself closer to the door, position their eyes against the peepholes and when gazing through, the visitor encounters a brick wall that could block but actually only frames the nude figure with the landscape in the background. These stages for seeing can be understood as passages, changeovers that make explicit the transitive nature of the work that actually addresses the passage from a traditional viewpoint, in which an art exhibition is constituted, to what Duchamp has gifted as his legacy in this creative testament. In his last work, he bequeathed a sort of conceptual manual that one can use when curating post-Duchampian art, which is the art that is predominant in the contemporary period.

Thus, in the culmination of the retrospective exhibition of Duchamp's works, in the darkness with *Étant Donnés*, his last artwork which is also his last curatorship, considered and understood as one, Duchamp pointed out a few issues: the act of looking, the body, the passages, movement and time. These topics might be contained in and exposed by post-Duchampian art so as to provoke an awakening of the viewer's consciousness, the perception of the surrounding space and its context. It is an operation that does not happen only in the retina but involves the whole body, not being detached from the mind. In an anti-Cartesian way, body and mind constitute one single entity that shapes the viewer/participant who will complete the aesthetic experience proposed by the artist and remarkably transferred to the exhibition space by the curator. The context proffered by the curator involves the viewer/participant and will induce the public to contribute to the art experience. To accomplish this, the curatorial project needs to be connected to what is going to be exposed.

Moreover, it has to be based on transparency as demonstrated by Duchamp. The curatorial thinking is there providing support but is not apparent. In the Duchampian curatorial practice what is going to be in evidence is the artwork itself. *Étant Donnés* is a self-referential and critical artwork that brings a more straightforward answer to the questions that post-Duchampian art raises in the realm of curatorship. In more general terms it is about how to introduce art to the public. A long time before the whole secret of *Étant Donnés* was revealed, Duchamp had written notes about it in the *Green Box* (1934, figure 97) as a preface to the *Large Glass* (figure 98): One can read this Duchampian diagram as a curatorial guide.

Amalgamement

Etant donné <sup>[dans l'obscurité]</sup> 1<sup>re</sup> la chute d'eau  
 Soit, donné 2<sup>e</sup> le gaz d'éclairage, dans l'obscurité,  
 ?  $\longleftrightarrow$  ?

on déterminera les conditions de l'exposition  
 extra-rapide (= <sup>Reproduction</sup> ~~apparance~~ <sup>allegorique</sup> ~~allegorique~~) de plusieurs  
 collisions <sup>[attentats]</sup> semblant se succéder rigoureusement  
 chacune à chacune suivant des lois, pour  
 isoler le signe de la concordance entre cette  
 exposition extra-rapide (capable de toutes les  
 excentricités) d'une part et ~~son~~ <sup>le</sup> choix des possi-  
 bilités légitimées par ces lois d'autre part.

Composition algébrique

$\frac{a}{b}$  a étant l'exposition  
 b " les possibilités

le rapport  $\frac{a}{b}$  est tout entier non pas dans un  
~~nombre~~ <sup>rapport</sup>  $\frac{a}{b} = c$  mais dans le signe (-) qui sépare  
~~les~~  $a$  et  $b$ ; <sup>donc</sup>  $a$  et  $b$  sont connus, ils deviennent  
 des unités <sup>nouvelles</sup> et perdent leur valeur numérique <sup>relative</sup> (ou de durée)  
 ; reste le signe - qui les sépare (signe de la  
 concordance ou plutôt de... chance)

Figure 97

Marcel Duchamp, Preface to the Large Glass, from the Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Green Box)

Preface

- Given 1. the waterfall  
2. the illuminating gas,

one will determine  
we shall determine the conditions  
for the instantaneous State of Rest (or allegorical appearance)  
of a succession [of a group] of various facts  
seeming to necessitate each other  
under certain laws, in order to isolate the sign  
the  
of accordance between, on the one hand,  
this State of Rest (capable of all the innumerable eccentricities)  
and, on the other, a choice of Possibilities  
authorized by these laws and also  
determining them

Figure 98

Marcel Duchamp's Preface to the Large Glass Diagram. Typographic Version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchamp's Green Box trans. George Heard Hamilton, Stuttgart: Hansjörg Mayer, 1976

In the diagram, attention is immediately drawn to the fact that Duchamp sidesteps from the common explanations found in the art universe and uses an algebraic formulation to handle what he intends to elucidate. From the point of view of a mapping of the relations that are made in *Étant Donnés*, the use of a mathematical artifice to diagrammatically explain the artwork can be understood as a strategy to minimize the optical, purely phenomenological aspect of the artwork, concentrating the explanations on the intellectual aspect that the artwork presents. More than an image, what one uncovers is a diagram of the relations that Duchamp developed throughout his career. The artwork, in this way, consists of a series of movements that follow algorithmic rules, like in a game of chess, whose results are open, not determined in advance. In other words, the strength of the interpretation of a non-retinal artwork is not in Gestalt's understanding<sup>58</sup> of the formal relations that the eye sees, but rather in an organizational layer that, beyond mere appearance, invites the public to set foot in a universe that challenges the limits of the world's pre-established organization. Duchamp establishes a new order, just as Foucault (2002) noted that Velásquez had done with *Las Meninas* (figure 19). The player-artist proposes and executes a vision of a complex world, where what is only perceived by the eyes can be in fact deceiving. This observation had already been made by Plato, when the Greek philosopher warns us that we should not rely on our senses – especially on vision – but rather on a mathematical, intellectual understanding of reality (Plato, 2007).

That being said, this Duchampian formula can be examined following the diagram:

'We shall determine the conditions for the instantaneous State of Rest (or allegorical appearance)'

'The State of Rest' designates the artwork before its contact with the public. This 'State of Rest' has a transitive nature and will change promptly. In 'we shall determine', Duchamp may be talking to whoever is in charge of bringing the artwork to the public, in our hypothetical case, the curator.

58 Gestalt is a German word that means configurable form. Gestaltpsychologie or Gestalttheorie was formulated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Berlin, based on the ideas of an Austrian psychologist, Cristian von Ehrenfels, who presented a study in 1890 focused on the understanding of the mental phenomena that lead to the propensity for visual ordering. Ever since its origin Gestalt has had an affinity with art. Gestaltian notions, in a general way, predict that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. That is, an experiment cannot be defined by the enumeration of its components. The apprehension of reality is influenced by some common laws. Four principles of Gestalt can help explain these mental norms: tendency to structuring; figure-ground segmentation; pregnancy of good form; perceptual constancy. In Gestalt it is believed that there is a natural tendency towards stability (Arnheim, 1996).

‘of the succession [of a group] of various facts, seeming to necessitate each other under certain laws, in order to isolate the sign’

The ‘succession of facts’ are the layers of inferences that are connected to post-Duchampian art, one of which could be: the context in which the artwork was created (when, where, by whom), that is highly significant when forging how it will be manifested in the public realm. It can also be the artwork’s public presentation trajectory, the artistic coefficient that the artist wanted to communicate that gained new meanings upon its realization and emergence into the world. ‘Certain laws’ can be understood as the curatorial practice itself that needs to be sensitive to the ‘succession of various facts’ to consequently isolate the ‘sign’ that is going to emerge once the artwork leaves its ‘State of Rest’.

‘Of/the accordance between, on the one hand, all this State of Rest (capable of innumerable eccentricities) and, on the other, a choice of Possibilities authorized by these laws and also determining them.’

‘Accordance between’ is the agreement, the fine balance that must be achieved in order for the artwork to transit from the ‘State of Rest’ with its ‘innumerable eccentricities’, i.e. its uniqueness or different and unusual aspects and then engage the public. It is interesting to note that he wrote the accordance between, and not in accordance with, this implies that is not an ‘in conformity with’ or ‘in obedience to’, it is a condition that is jointly fulfilled. Subsequently, Duchamp drew attention to the ‘choice of Possibilities’ which is the disclosing of new meanings that the ‘laws’, or in this case the curatorship, facilitates or can arrange.

Hence, through both this examination of Duchamp’s notes and this imaginative and useful exercise of reading them as a curatorial guideline, we come across the synthesis of what would be Duchamp’s curatorial practice. To conclude this section and go onto our case studies we will quote a comment by O’Doherty (1986) in which he treats Duchamp’s achievements fairly:

By exposing the effect of context on art, the container on the contained, Duchamp recognized an area of art that hadn’t yet been invented. This invention of context initiated a series of gestures that ‘develop’ the idea of a gallery space as a single unit, suitable for manipulation as an aesthetic counter. From this moment on, there is a seepage of energy from art to its surroundings. (1986, p.73)

The operations performed by Duchamp are complex and profoundly altered the understanding of what art is and, more importantly, what the role

of art is in a wider context which concerns the entire social body, without being limited to just the closed circle of art itself. Many of the questions that Duchamp pointed out began to make sense many years after his death. A clear example is his role as a curator, in an age where the function did not have the relevance it has nowadays, where the curatorial activity becomes progressively complex to try to assign an order and a meaning, even if temporary, to a world that turns out to be increasingly algorithmic, with rules that allow new language arrangements to emerge. In this context, the retina is increasingly the gateway to information that must be processed by an intellect that seeks tirelessly to attribute meaning to the set of signs that phenomenologically open themselves to perception. Thus, if the curatorial activity apparently formalizes an arrangement – of works or ideas – the operation in question is subtler, requiring a closer look, since the importance of curatorship to contemporary art is to point to new meanings and ways of organizing the world through language, opening up possibilities for interpretation. With *Étant Donnés*, Duchamp acted not at the pictorial level, but instead at the syntactic level, in the way language organizes itself and enables us to access the world.

The Duchampian operation shifts from the phenomenological analysis, that is, from the way in which the things of the world appear in our mind (Houser & Kloesel, 1992) to how they can be organized to give meaning to the experiences of which they are signs<sup>59</sup>. One starts with logic (phenomenology) and moves onto the concrete experience that is intellectualized and gives way to new forms of languages: new arrangements of the world. This is, in curatorial terms, the greatest Duchampian legacy, to have pointed out, in a practical manner, this transition that is central to contemporary curatorial practices and to be able to see and establish new relationships from language arrangements. The next sections focus on the analysis of these characteristics in exhibitions of selected artists.

59 It is important to remember what is understood as a sign in the context of this thesis 'A Sign is a thing which serves to convey knowledge of some other thing, which it is said to *stand for* or *represent*. This thing is called the *object* of the sign. The idea in the mind that the sign excites, which is a mental sign of the same object, is called an *Interpretant* of the sign. Signs fit into three classes, namely *Icons* (or images), *Indices* and *Symbols*' (Peirce in Houser & Kloesel 1992, p.13). In other words, a sign 'is a Representamen with a mental interpretant' (Peirce in Houser & Kloesel 1992, p.273), something that presents itself to an interpretant mind as a representative of something else. According to Peirce, we have access to phenomena always through signs, mediators of the cognitive perception process of what they represent. What the sign represents is named as being its object. It is important to point out that the sign, however, is not the object. It is only in the place of the object. Therefore, it can only represent this object in a certain way and to a certain extent.



### **3.2 FIRST CASE STUDY: HÉLIO OITICICA**

The Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (Rio de Janeiro, 1937-1980) used to say that he was not a 'career artist' in the sense that he did not wish to be categorized under an established label (Salomão, 2003). Hélio Oiticica's early works were influenced by Constructivism and fell within the framework of geometric abstractionism, but his particular political aesthetic regarding the liberation of the viewer, which spurred his interests in the art experience, set him apart. Soon after, he was creating works that went beyond the two-dimensional picture plane and addressed ubiquitous social and political realities in his native Brazil. The artist's works are, indeed, difficult to place within one movement or style.

This hybridism can be seen starting from the artworks Hélio Oiticica made during the 1950s and 1960s when he was associated with Brazilian Concrete Art. Brazilian Concrete Art had two divergent tendencies, but both had as their main aesthetic concern the pictorial elements in art such as colour, shapes and lines, avoiding any figurative references. Generally speaking, in São Paulo the advent of Concrete Poetry and Concrete Art, which was the main topic of the inaugural 1<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Biennial in 1951, was followed by the emergence of the group Grupo Ruptura, founded in 1952 with a manifesto and an exhibition at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art. They were predominantly influenced by Geometric Abstractionism, the theory of pure visibility, and connected to Gestalt theory. The artists could be characterised as having a single style and strict creative process rules that were against informal or expressionist abstractionism.

In Rio de Janeiro the first group of artists recognisably associated with Concrete Art was Grupo Frente, initiated in 1954 by the artist Ivan Serpa (Rio de Janeiro, 1923-1973). He was also an art teacher at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro and Hélio Oiticica was one of his pupils. Grupo Frente's artists did not have a particular methodology geared towards the creative process. However, all shared the goal to develop an artistic approach that would go beyond the figurative and nationalist images that were the main features of Brazilian Modernism.

Hélio Oiticica participated in Grupo Frente and later the Neoconcreto group. Some members of Grupo Frente, including Hélio Oiticica, became part of the Neoconcreto movement in 1959, which unlike the group from São Pau-

lo, tried to avoid a strong sense of rationalism and was open to more innovative techniques. Regarding the Neoconcrete Michael Asbury wrote:

Neoconcretism as the name suggests was a reaction to the intransigence of Brazilian concrete poetry and art. It rejected the idea that a work of art could be predetermined, since this would inevitably dispose of chance and expression within the creative process. [...] In this sense it is inaugural within the Brazilian context, since by ignoring the perverse desire to be up-to-date with metropolitan fashions, it stubbornly became the first instance in which genuinely new theoretical propositions within the field of art were able to arise, and thus established an autonomy for the local production which became highly productive for artists – of the most diverse tendencies – during the following decades. (Asbury, 2009, p.2)

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Oiticica experimented with architectural environments and also the 'Quasi Cinemas' which he developed after moving to New York in 1970. He had briefly stayed there in the June of that year when he participated in the group exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art. In December, he won a Guggenheim fellowship and settled permanently in New York where he lived until 1978, when he returned to Rio de Janeiro.

The son of the entomologist, photographer and painter José Oiticica Filho and the grandson of the intellectual anarchist José Oiticica, Hélio Oiticica started studying art at the age of 16 in Rio de Janeiro. He was a prolific writer and, in his journals one finds a well-structured clarification of his concerns regarding his creative process, his attitudes towards social and historical events that overflowed beyond the art field and there are also philosophical reflections upon the state of art in general. Since the beginning of his trajectory as an artist, he was acutely aware of his political environment and deeply engaged with concerns that went against the naturalistic representation of the exterior world. Even when he was producing his initial works, abstract forms painted on cardboard (1955-1956, figure 99), and subsequently the *Metaesquemas* (1957-1959, figure 100) – a series of around 350 pieces that were the last ones that Oiticica envisaged being hung on a wall – his aims were not geared towards a pictorial language. Similar to Duchamp when he addressed his *Large Glass*, Oiticica did not want these pieces to be called 'paintings' or 'drawings' (Oiticica, 1972), he actually defined them as 'obsessive dissection of space' (Ramírez, 2007, p.147):



Figure 99

Oiticica's initial works, abstract forms painted on cardboards (1955-1956)

Available at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/helio-oiticica/helio-oiticica-exhibition-guide/helio-oiticica-7>

(Accessed 15 October 2016)

*Metaesquemas* are open to open structures: in the white-on white or colour-and-same-colour plane paintings that follow and, farther ahead, in the inventions (single colour squares) of 1959, I arrived at painting when representation had dried up for me in these *Metaesquemas*, and soon painting, too, had reached its end: the discovery of the end of painting in the coloured square: they are inventions because they carry total painting-load: because they anticipate possibilities beyond painting. (Oiticica cited in Ramírez, 2007, p.147)

During his life, Oiticica was more than an artist in the ordinary sense of the expression. He is considered much more a proponent of aesthetic experiences. In an interview Oiticica stated the difference between what his understand-

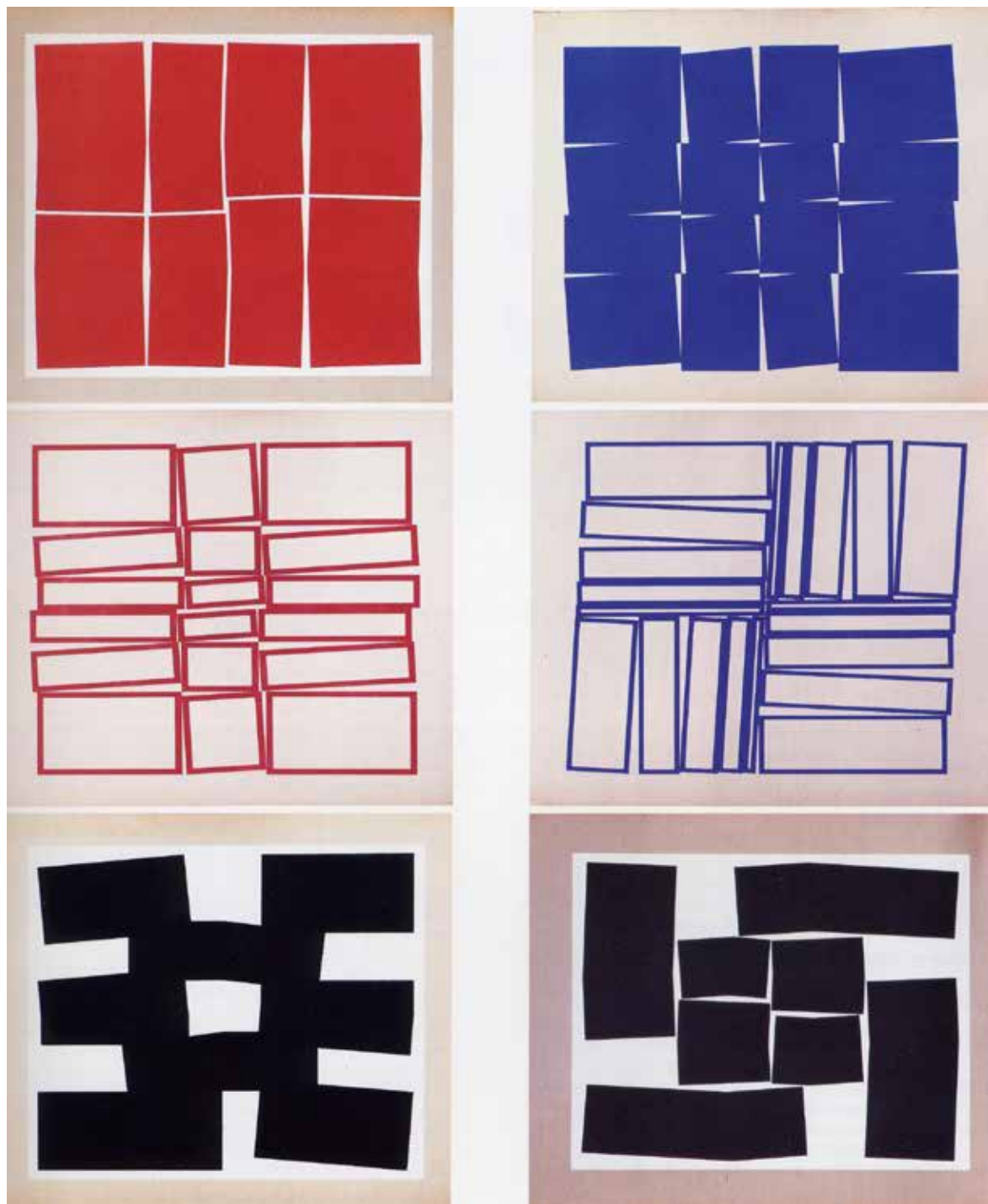


Figure 100  
Metaesquemas  
Oiticica, H. (1957-1959)

ing of what an artist should be was and what being an artist is normally comprehended as:

Building a career as an artist, with honourable exceptions, has become more commercial than artistic. Every authentic artist is a disqualified person, and as art is transformed into a profession, it creates a contradiction. Making money is not an essential thing of art, of artistic activity, it does not belong to its structure. The person can start doing what they do not want to just to make money, because the formula pleased them. I do not mean that making money is not stimulating, but you cannot generalize and rely on it. The ideal situation would be for someone to produce us, even when we are doing nothing. Not in the sense of patronage, but in a more capitalist scheme. If not, it is better to live a 9-5 job life. (Oiticica cited in Salomão, 2003, p. 174)

Combining intellectual rigour and solid constructive rules that, instead of curtailing the public's freedom, acted as deconditioning systems, Oiticica, like Duchamp, was a player. His works can be seen as aesthetic games, where the players – the public metamorphosed into active participants in the construction of the aesthetic narrative and in the attribution of new semantics to the games proposed by the artist – are free to experiment. Oiticica's aesthetic play is a gateway to freedom. An avid reader of important philosophers, the Brazilian player-artist appropriates various philosophical conceptions to construct his syntactic universe, such as when, influenced by Nietzsche<sup>60</sup>, he affirms that what he does is music. As considerable part of Oiticica's artworks consist of aesthetic play, they undergo a process of hybridization, dissolving amid the mutations provoked by the players that constantly remake them, the artworks or the aesthetic games.

The artist has an interest in human beings in their entirety. The public-player's participation in Oiticica never had the coldness found in other experiences where the contribution existent in the fruition is purely mechanical and the public is, in reality, passive and susceptible to pre-conceived effects. For

60 Nietzsche regarded music as the greatest aesthetic expression possible, being the inexhaustible source for all other forms of art, attributing to it a dramatic and sensitive value that frees human beings from their bonds and places them in a position of being free. Music which is more *poiesis* than *mimesis* for the German philosopher, is also a source of knowledge. As a territory free of representation, music does not need any index external to itself, which turns it into the space par excellence for aesthetic experimentation, from which arises an ethic that empowers mankind and makes him conscious and master of himself (Nietzsche, 1993).

Oiticica, the construction of the experience and of the work itself, since without the public's effective participation there is no work, occurs on the tripod comprised of three basic categories, identified by Justino (1998): indetermination, transient and chance. These characteristics are very similar to what we have already seen regarding Duchamp's oeuvre. It is in this open space that the sensory merges with the intellectual to create an experience that was not, and couldn't even be, predicted by the artist.

Oiticica positions himself as a proposer, animator of collective repertoires, since the elements that constitute the participatory game are available: the samba, the capes, the pictorial principles, the pigments, stones, sand, and leaves. However, these signs are organized and only acquire a fuller meaning 'with the incorporation of the richest element, the participant, who becomes body and work'. (Justino, 1998, p.46).

Oiticica's oeuvre and biography have already been studied extensively in several studies and books (Justino, 1998; Favaretto, 2000; Salomão, 2003; Ramírez, 2007; Brett and Figueiredo, 2007), not being therefore the focus of this thesis. What interests us here is to establish links between Oiticica and post-Duchampian reality. Unlike Duchamp, Oiticica was not a chess player, but he understood as few other artists did, the importance of art as being primarily a liberating game. Oiticica was a player of a different kind, who proposes aesthetic games, artworks in an endless process of transformation in which the context where they were created is as important as the context in which they are presented to the public.

Oiticica's artworks were created following post-Duchampian precepts. Once when asked about the experimental nature of his work and its correlation with the context, Oiticica gave an answer that provides the link for the main investigation of this thesis:

Interviewers: If conventional art, the painting on the wall, the sculpture, by virtue of circumstances end up in the halls of the bourgeoisie, doesn't experimental work, of rupture, run the same risk due to not questioning how it exists socially, where it circulates?

HO: Of course, that is why I want to do these big things, for public spaces. The ideal was to do something a bit similar to Duchamp, who made a special place for things. That was always my idea, so I never

sold many of my works, the only thing I really sell, are the things that are for the wall. (Oiticica, 1980, p.4)

Not only this time, but also in other writings by Oiticica are there several references to Duchamp. Oiticica like other artists of his generation was directly influenced by Duchamp's legacy. One could say that chronologically Oiticica arrived in New York one year after *Étant Donnés* opened in neighbouring Philadelphia and hence it would be possible to build a more direct connection between the two artists, yet such an operation would be against the teachings of Duchamp and of Oiticica himself, since this type of genealogy is typical of the modernist reading of Alfred Barr. Truly relevant to us are the conceptual points of contact in the reformulations that both proposed for the aesthetic experience, that in the exercise of this thesis we shall interpret as aesthetic games. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning another passage in which Oiticica mentions Duchamp's importance and also demonstrates how little the artistic scene of the time understood Duchamp's feats:

[...] it is not up to the inventor-artist to add works: there is no 'style': with DUCHAMP all this has already reached the limit: and with ARTAUD?: and why are artists looking for unity?: Coherence?, the unit? In short, wanting to re-establish the old 'style'!: whoever does not put a stop to the problem of the artwork will be treading water by making 'works' mechanically: isn't this what is happening? (And they even use DUCHAMP as model!) (Oiticica, 1979, p.3)

Oiticica's astonished exclamation concerns Duchamp's strategy of the readymade incorporated indiscriminately and without critical reflections by the art circuit. As already mentioned in this thesis, throughout his life Duchamp produced few readymades and all within a specific and precise context. Oiticica, however, understood what Duchamp had transformed in terms of the convergence of the artwork and the public.

Having made these observations, we begin treating the concept of play as the central element in the post-Duchampian art developed by Oiticica, whose main objective was to free modern man, when he realized that:

[...] modern man subjugated by social organization, agency and domestication of all spaces. Society delimits, programs and controls the space of work and pleasure, whether through poverty (both economic and of



ideas), or even through the colonized unconscious. Therefore, the aesthetic dimension must be rescued or stimulated. The artist has almost an ethical imperative to pursue this dimension. (Justino, 1998, p.8)

In general, the concept of play reveals itself through ludic activities that develop at first in a disinterested manner, being independent of the behaviour, mood or the very subjectivity of whoever participates as a player. Play has an independent character, is not conditioned by who plays it, let alone being determined by the player. Its autonomous nature dispenses with the presence of another subject to exist. The mode of being of play is essentially pure movement, devoid of goal, that establishes itself in the form of eternal return, of a ritual where there is no law of causality based on cause/effect relationships. It is movement itself, independent, even of the one who executes or observes it. There is no need even for a fixed subject for its existence and maintenance, since play is the realization of the movement as such (Gadamer, 2006).

The playful act can therefore be called 'living form' according to Schiller (2004), designating all the features related to what we observe and create. Play should thus be understood as a state of the human being, where s/he is free and relates to freedom in an unimpeded way. With regard to the player it is necessary, of course, for a game to exist and act as a mediating element. For the act of playing there is, however, no need for another subjectivity to participate effectively, but it is indispensable for some kind of element to exist that counterbalances the player's actions and moves. Bringing this concept to the art realm we can quote Gadamer when he wrote:

When we speak of play in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play, but the mode of being of the work of art itself. In analysing aesthetic consciousness we recognized that conceiving aesthetic consciousness as something that confronts an object does not do justice to the real situation. (Gadamer, 2006, p.102)

Play is free from tensioning, from any kind of friction with another internal or external factor, being something that moves as if by itself (Gadamer, 2006). From the player's point of view, the absence of tension experienced in the aesthetic game translates as total relief, relaxation from the constant need to mediate conflicts between objects that constantly collide. The separation between

the player and the object of the game causes the former to be left without any imposition or commands.

The movement backward and forward is obviously so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is the game that is played—it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such. (Gadamer, 2006, p.104)

Aesthetic play for Schiller (2004) is simultaneously a state of mind and of action. As it is both at the same time, it serves as decisive proof that passivity does not exclude activity, nor does matter exclude form and nor does the existence of rules exclude the infiniteness of possibilities. The experience with aesthetic play is liberating since it is the experience of life and allows those who contemplate to also be the author of what is contemplated, in an eternal feedback. There is no division between producer and enjoyer. There are only players, leading Gadamer to affirm that:

The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence. This is also seen in the spontaneous tendency to repetition that emerges in the player and in the constant self-renewal of play, which affects its form (e.g., the refrain). (Gadamer, 2006, p.105)

The change that occurs in the player on encountering the experience provided by the play is noticeable. It is the game that triggers the verb, the element of action, of transformation. The aesthetic game is what remains in the relationship, although it is also altered, constituting a huge repository that reflects its own history, of which it is the centrepiece. Although there is a connection between play and player, it is essential to stress that the game has a nature of its own, independent of the players' conscience (Gadamer, 2006).

Gadamer's theory assures that there is seriousness in play, pointing out that this element is necessary for the player to enter the game: 'The player himself knows play is only play and that it exists in a world determined by the seriousness of purposes.' (Gadamer, 2006, p.103). Whoever does not dedicate to play the seriousness that the act deserves does not constitute her/himself fully as a player and remains conditioned. Even when players do not act, the mode of being of play, which has an independent nature, remains present. Play is present

even when arbitrary attempts at division between rationality and sensibility seek to conceal the playful aspect of human existence.

The understanding of Oiticica's artistic production as aesthetic play not only inserts it into the heart of the post-Duchampian field but also guarantees an inner movement to its artworks, which renew themselves in different possibilities when they are used by the public-players. The Brazilian artist was very aware of the importance of aesthetic play, having created a specific terminology to address it, combining the senses of creativity, faith, leisure and pleasure: 'Creleisure':

Is Creleisure creation of leisure or belief in leisure? I don't know, maybe both, maybe neither. The dumbos can quit at this point, because they will never understand: it is stupidity which predominates in art criticism... luckily they were punished by their own indifference to pleasure, to leisure... (Oiticica, 1993, p. 135).

The concept around 'Creleisure' emerged from the idea of Éden. According to Small (2016), Oiticica first began to formulate his notion of 'creleisure' in a text of January 14, 1969 as a diary entry. The artist wrote:

The idea of Creleisure arises slowly with the Éden concept, in fact it is its profound sense: leisure in itself, an opened idea based in a behavior state that, internally, will require a transformation or an identification of the ones who want to penetrate it, but this transformation would not be pre-dictated: be that, or that, no – you can't buy a piece, because also the idea of a solid work to be bought is a fake: the nests, or tents, or bed, etc. are Nuclei for leisure, for it, given in a specific context, but that must be different relating to each person's internal feelings; no use having something as an object, distorted then to bourgeois structure, etc, because it relates to the idea of the non-representative leisure, creative, it is not the place for divertive thoughts, but for the replacement of myth in our lives, the cresleep conscious of itself. I am planning the Barracão which should be the whole communal environment for the Creleisure in my specific group in Rio de Janeiro. (Oiticica, 1993, p. 132)

For the mode of being of play to be effective, it is necessary for the players to enter the game, which in the case of Oiticica's artworks takes place through the active participation in the construction of their narratives that can be established in the exhibition space. The focus also shifts from the retina, observation-

al act, to intellectual fruition through the body's active presence. Players must negotiate their own repertoires, being open to permeation and contamination by repertoires coming from other players who perform an aesthetic play. Oiticica realised that:

From the 'playful' propositions to those of the 'act', from the 'pure word' semantic propositions to those of the 'word in the object', in 'narrative' works and works of political or social protest, what is being sought is an objective mode of participation. This would be the internal search, inside and outside of the object, desired by the proposition of active spectator participation in the process: the individual to whom the work is addressed is invited to complete the meanings proposed by it — it is thus an open work. This process, as it has emerged in Brazil, is intimately connected to that of the break-up of the picture, and the arrival at the object, relief and anti-picture (narrative picture). (Oiticica cited in Buchmann & Cruz, 2013, p.39).

For this process to be effective, some rules must necessarily be established to guarantee the exchanges. Since all games have restrictions or rules (Gadamer, 2006), this gives an artist like Oiticica an even more central role, for inaugurating this interaction from the set of rules that he, artist-player, stipulated. Players, in turn, should regard the process and act with seriousness, accepting rules that make sense when fostering the freedom of the player. In this way, the aesthetic game provides detachment and freedom, acting for the individual's expansion.

Let us take as an example Oiticica's set of works called *Parangolés* (1964-1968, figures 101 and 102) and defined by the poet Haroldo de Campos as 'Hang-gliders to Ecstasy' (Campos, 1993). The *Parangolés*, formally capes to be worn that allow the player-public to enter a new spatial configuration through their de-programming rules, are considered by Oiticica to be 'environmental programs':

My environmental program, which I call *parangolé*, does not intend to establish a new morality or anything similar, but to overthrow all morals, since they tend towards a stagnating conformism, to stereotype opinions and create non-creative concepts [...] The *parangolés* are, thus, programs designed to open individual behaviour toward the collective. In this way, they enrich the experience of life. (Oiticica cited in Justino, 1998, p.43).



Figure 101  
Parangolé Capa 11/ Eu incorporo a revolta  
Oiticica, H. (1967)





Figure 102  
Parangolé P4/Parangolé Capa 1  
Oiticica, H. (1964)

Furthermore:

The *Parangolés* reveals its fundamental nature as ‘environmental structure’ the principal nucleus of which is the work-participator, deconstructed into ‘participator’ (when watching) and ‘work’ (when being seen from outside this environmental time-space). When related within a given environment (such as an exhibition, for instance), these work-participator nuclei create a *Parangolé* ‘environmental system’ which, in turn, may be watched by other participators. (Oiticica cited in Ramírez, 2007, p.298).

The aesthetic game promoted by the capes occurs around the body of the participator who activates the magic space authorized by the rules governing the game, performing a cyclical operation that involves ‘dressing’ and ‘feeling’ rather than just ‘seeing’. The magic space that enables the aesthetic game is created by the rules developed by the artist. The players act, then, in favour of the game and not the other way around:

All my previous work, which now culminates in the formulation of the *Parangolé*, seeks this magical embodiment of the work’s elements as such, in a total life experience [*vivência*] of the spectator, whom I now call a ‘participator’ (Oiticica cited in Ramírez, 2007, p.298).

The *Parangolé* experience as an aesthetic game is analogous to Schiller’s conception that we discussed above concerning the game as a living form, which acts in the fullest sense of an aesthetic experience, that is, to ethically modify the player’s experience. Oiticica was aware of the changes that the aesthetic game can bring to those who experience it as a player – who take the game seriously – as is made clear in the following passage:

Wearing [the *Parangolés*] – in and of itself – constitutes the work’s experiential totality for, in manipulating it, even as his own body becomes the central nucleus, the spectator somehow experiences that spatial transmutation which takes place there: he perceives himself as the work’s structural nucleus and the experiential consequence(s) of that intercorporeal space. There is a sort of violation of his/her [temporary] being as an ‘individual’ in the world, differentiated yet simultaneously ‘collective,’ to that of a ‘participator,’ in the sense of motor center and nucleus – which is not merely ‘motor’ but also ‘symbolic’ – of the work-structure. This is the true metamorphosis, as may be verified in



the work-spectator (or work-participator) relationship (Oiticica cited in Ramírez, 2007, 298).

How are such questions activated or disregarded in exhibitions that bring Oiticica's aesthetic games, displaced from their original environment? With this question we return to the manual-legacy left by Duchamp when he wrote the diagram in the inception of *Étant Donnés*: 'a choice of Possibilities authorized by these laws and also determining them.' These laws or rules can be clarified by curatorial operations. This is a central curatorial matter that we shall analyse according to post-Duchampian concerns that have been scrutinised in this thesis.

Oiticica always sought out new ways to bring ordinary life materials, images and contextual situations into art and being a proposer of aesthetically playful manoeuvres as such, his production has challenged and still challenges curators. Very recently, during the making of the exhibition *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* which opened in October 2016 at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, and will subsequently travel to other cities in the USA to be presented at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York, the curator De Salvo wrote about the peculiarities of dealing with said oeuvre:

This fluidity of ideas extended to what Oiticica made or called his art, and to its presentation, which invariably involved a mix of engagement and enactment. In fact, it is fair to say that Oiticica's work is most complex in its exhibition, which, from the beginning, was as much a concern for him as what he was making and showing; the two were always inextricable. In many ways, it is easier to describe what a given Oiticica work does than what it is. Even more complicated, the presentation Oiticica felt adequate to this dynamic – of object and engagement of both viewer and context – was continually subject to adjustment. (De Salvo, 2016, p.270)

This statement places in the spotlight, on a case study scale, the main argument of this investigation into Duchampian art and curatorial practice and how his legacy can be transposed to the contemporary period. If Duchamp gave impetus to the main transformation in the art field of the past centuries, he did not do so without providing a *terra firma* for these changes (stimulated by him) to settle and further evolve themselves. This fact is remarkable when examining

the case of Oiticica. The Brazilian artist incorporated the legacy of post-Duchampian art making and he was, as cited above, absolutely aware that the artwork would only find its redemption once it met the public. Bearing this thought in mind as a true and crucial point to what would prevail in his art practice, Oiticica gave to the art experience, to the encounter of the artwork with the public, the same relevance of the art making itself. In doing so, Oiticica was one of the first artists to truly incorporate the concerns regarding the exhibition space as part of his artistic manifestations. As De Salvo explained:

[...] Oiticica expressed his thinking at the time about the limits of the traditional exhibition format. He had come to feel that the gallery was not a fixed space in which to display inert objects, but a place in which to experiment, and that the museum exhibition had 'exhausted itself' as a form. (De Salvo, 2016, p.271)

This is the reason, as aforementioned in this chapter, that Oiticica had Duchamp as a model of someone who understood that it is necessary to 'build a special place' for the artwork, which means preparing the conditions in which the artwork can be experienced. According to the art historians who have delved into Oiticica's oeuvre, the Brazilian artist firstly reached a certain peak in the changes that he wanted to bring to the 'traditional exhibition format' in 1969 when he presented, in London, *The Whitechapel Experience*. This was a solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery (figure 103), where the visitor was invited to take off his/her shoes and walk bare-foot on the sandy floor of *Éden* (1969, figure 104), to lie down on Oiticica's *Nests* (figure 105) and to play with the *Bólides* (1963-1967, figures 106 e 107) or *Parangolés*. About the experience the artist wrote:

Structures become general, given, open to collective-casual-momentary behaviour; in Whitechapel, behaviour opens itself up for whoever arrives and bends forward into the created environment, from the cold of London streets, repetitive, closed and monumental, and recreates himself as if back to nature, to the childhood warmth of allowing oneself to become absorbed: self absorption, in the uterus of the constructed open space, which, more than 'gallery' or 'shelter', this space was. (Oiticica cited in Brett, 2004, p.63)

The critic and curator Guy Brett (2005) who was one of the organizers and the main driving force to achieve *The Whitechapel Experience* – which Oiticica refused to call 'exhibition' but in Portuguese *Experiência* means both 'exper-

iment' or 'experience' – reminds us that the event anticipated any type of 'participatory' or 'interaction' art that would progress in the art scene during the 1970s in Europe and in North America: 'It was one of the most daring visual art events in the 1960s and 1970s in London' (Brett, 2005, p.42). For this reason, it divided opinions, provoking a great level of perplexity in the more conservative art critics who could not cope with the playful approach that Oiticica was introducing for the first time<sup>61</sup>. Brett argued that some critics did not perceive the paradigm change that Oiticica was offering and judged him as not being serious. However, Oiticica was indeed highly conscious of every single effect that the 'experience' would generate and was absolutely aware of its contextual elements. Oiticica was there himself, almost living in the gallery during most of the time the exhibition was open (Brett, 2005). About the whole event Oiticica wrote:

From these premises, I decided to check the reactions, sensations, experiences in the course of the exhibition. I found something important: the information was contained in the environment itself: the works, if isolated on their own, would not be able to communicate their full meaning; the build environment was not without value, superficial, or decorative as it may seem to the less informed, but something that completed these works. (Oiticica cited in De Salvo, 2016, p.272)

With this 'experiment' Oiticica pursued the establishment of a certain 'mind-settlement' as named by the artist. According to Brett, it was clear that the artist 'wanted to identify a creative state, human invention and construction generally, with our most basic and receptive experiences on being in the world.' (Brett, 2004, p.63). Oiticica envisaged the opportunity to put into practice his thoughts and carried out most of his experiment in the space of the Whitechapel Gallery<sup>62</sup>. He was putting on a solo exhibition and almost literally made the exhibition area his home. Returning to the notion of aesthetic play, in the Whitechapel Gallery the artist with the help of the curators from the gallery and also Guy Brett was able and managed to set the rules for the aesthetic game and in doing so engaged the players. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis it is interesting to analyse how his 'experience' would work in temporal and spatial displacement. In this case, what can the artist and curator do, in a non-imposing manner, to determine the conditions for the aesthetic games to be appealing? And how

61 Brett (2005) mentioned that the newspaper *The Observer* attached little importance to the exhibition saying that it was 'childish'.

62 For a detailed account of the Whitechapel Experience please see the 2007 book by Brett & Figueiredo, *Oiticica in London*.



Figure 103  
Helio Oiticica's solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1969



Figure 104  
*Éden*  
Oiticica, H. (1969)



Figure 105  
Nests  
Oiticica, H. (1970)



Figure 106  
B29 Box Bólido 16  
Oiticica, H. (1963)



Figure 107  
Glass Bolide Homenagem a Mondrian  
Oiticica, H. (1965)



would the incorporation of such lively elements take place when the artist is not there? Before going further into this investigation that will finalise this study, this chapter shall introduce the second case study of transnational experience that is the oeuvre of the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles.

### **3.3 SECOND CASE STUDY: CILDO MEIRELES**

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1948, Cildo Meireles travelled as a child with his family to many parts of his continent-sized country. His father was an Indianist, an expert in the culture of native Brazilian people, who worked for the Brazilian Indian Protection Service and constantly participated in expeditions to visit isolated tribes. By 1958 his family had settled in the territory where there were plans to build Brasília, the modernist Brazilian capital designed by the architects Oscar Niemeyer and Lúcio Costa, where Meireles spent most of his adolescence. He was there when, in 1960, the 'new' Brasília, a focus for national sentiment, was inaugurated. This was a pivotal time in the country's history and for Meireles a period of a great intellectual and artistic curiosity: 'Brasília offered the opportunity to live a remarkable architectural and urban experience in the history of Brazil and the world' (Morais, 2005, p.19). Meireles remembers that at age 15, he had an urgent impulse to draw and assuaged his incessant need by taking art classes at the Fundação Cultural do Distrito Federal in Brasília. The young Meireles also enrolled in an experimental cinema course associated with the Brasília University (Morais, 2005). The art critic Frederico Moraes summarized what the atmosphere in the brand-new capital was like:

In the periodical section of the Brasília University Library, with a difference of only a week or two, Cildo had access to the best art magazines published in Europe and the U.S. It was like a party. (Morais, 2005, p. 19)

A few years later, however, the festive spirit and sense of optimism were abruptly disrupted. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 1964, a military coup overthrew the democratically elected President João Goulart and using force and intimidation took over the government. From this day until 1985, a sequence of generals ruled the military dictatorship, abusing Institutional Acts, decrees that practically cancelled the Brazilian Constitution. It was the end of free elections and free speech, and the government imposed heavy censorship on the media and

arts<sup>63</sup>. In an interview Meireles reminisces about the day after the coup and his reflections on that:

My political awakening came earlier, however, in 1964, when I was sixteen years old and living in Brasília. I was beginning to get involved in student politics. On 1<sup>st</sup> April, one day after the military coup, there was a demonstration in the central bus station. There were tanks surrounding the Congress building. Someone suggested we go there. At one point, I suddenly found a flag in my hand. I thought, hold on, what am I doing with this flag? I have no reason to be here; I am not trained to do this. It was at this moment that I realized the political left lacked structure and organization. There was a feeling, perhaps an illusion, that we could resist, but it was inarticulate. (Meireles cited in Herkenhoff, Mosquera & Cameron, 1999, p.28)

One can say that the feeling of inertia that overarched the political debate, in particular the civil organisations that were caught unprepared to fight against the dictatorial oppression, led Meireles to attempt to find through art other ways to resist the totalitarian regime. Experimentalism, with a focus on sensorial and playful aspects, was the legacy of the Neoconcrete movement in Brazil inherited by a younger generation, of which Meireles was part. After this drastic change in the social-political situation, this tendency to be experimental seemed to reorient artists to become more combative. Artistic practice was a means, sometimes clandestine, to deal with the lack of freedom and to confront the constraints imposed by the military government. In this sense, one of Meireles' most famous statements were when the artist explained that: 'In some way you become political when you don't have a chance to be poetic. I think human beings would much prefer to be poetic' (Meireles cited in Asbury, 2008, no pagination).

Closed down by the military regime, the art course at Fundação Cultural do Distrito Federal in Brasília ended its activities, but Meireles was invited by one of his tutors to continue working in his teacher's studio (Morais, 2005). At this point Meireles did not recognise himself as an artist but his intense creativity culminated in a precocious career debut at age 19, in 1967, at the Museum of Modern Art in Salvador, Bahia. It was his first solo exhibition titled *Cildo Meire-*

63 The situation became more violent when on 13th December 1968, the Fifth Institutional Act (AI-5) abolished every remaining civil and individual right. It legitimized a ferocious persecution that resulted in many imprisonments. The period between 1968 and 1974 was the most repressive, marked by torture and the elimination (death) of any opposition.

les: Drawings. Regarding this beginning of his trajectory Meireles said: 'When someone asked me what I did for a living, I never said that I was an artist. I always said that I was a draftsman, which I considered more specific. To say that I was an artist for me implied a much greater responsibility'. (quoted in Menezes, 2005). Nevertheless, later in a review of his career, Meireles would give much more importance to the drawings as an artistic expression. According to Morais, he continues to be a draftsman even when Meireles envisages three-dimensional artworks. The art critic affirmed that in order to discover the source of Meireles' creative process it is fundamental to understand his thought through his drawings. In this way, Morais said that it is easy to identify in Meireles' drawings

the route that goes from the initial spark to the completed artwork that occupies the space. The final artwork superficially has nothing to do with the drawings but in reality they are in them in some way. (Morais to Menezes, 2005a, p.1).

Meireles himself would later comment about the importance of his primary artistic expression:

I discovered that drawing, of the artistic languages, is the one that brings to light what is happening inside people. It brings a visual objectivity with a very great speed, almost instantaneous and with a spontaneity that I consider irreplaceable. Drawing reveals the real person. It is you and your depths without intermediation. I draw 98% of the time for the simple pleasure of exercising this wonderful thing that visual arts allows which is to try, at least feel that you are free, without commitment to reason, to discretion or elegance. In this reasoning, it may be more correct to use for the drawings the verb 'expose' which etymologically means 'set out' than the verb 'exhibit' which is best for an installation. (Meireles to Menezes, 2005a, p.2)

If, as Morais believed, in the drawings one can uncover the source of understanding Meireles' entire oeuvre, it is there also that we can determine Meireles' connection to post-Duchampian art. Morais wrote that in these earlier drawings in which text and image run together (figure 108), in the same medium almost in parallel, iconographically integrated, but that do not necessarily illustrate or comment on each other, already resides a prelude of a Duchampian constant that would feature in Meireles' later artworks. To support his statement, Morais argued that the drawings, which conceptually merge text and image,



Figure 108  
Example of Meireles earlier drawings

function as a trigger to the spectator's intellectual participation (Morais, 2005), a Duchampian operation that Meireles elaborates in his own manner and that we shall examine further here.

After the exhibition in Salvador, Bahia, where Meireles lived for two months, he did not go back to Brasília but instead moved to his original city, Rio de Janeiro, where he could again initiate a formal education in the Arts at the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes. He recollected that the art scene there was more interdisciplinary than in Brasília and that in this period he had not ceased drawing, but drawings were no longer his foremost interest. For example, *Virtual Spaces: Corners* (1968, figure 109) a series of drawings in graphite on millimetre graph paper was the base for the *Corners* series (1967-1968/2008). This series is composed of a set of wooden structures that shape the corner of an ordinary room with a woodblock floor and baseboard, whose normal size is 3m x 1m x 1m. In the drawings and the architectural structures, Meireles plays with mathematical logic by introducing unexpected interruptions in the spatial dimensions. In *Corner IV* (figure 110), for instance, a wedge breaks the perfect angle, producing an irrational exit from the intersection of the walls. It was a projection of his art practice, until then developed in the two-dimensional plane, gaining volume and form and being integrated into the environment.

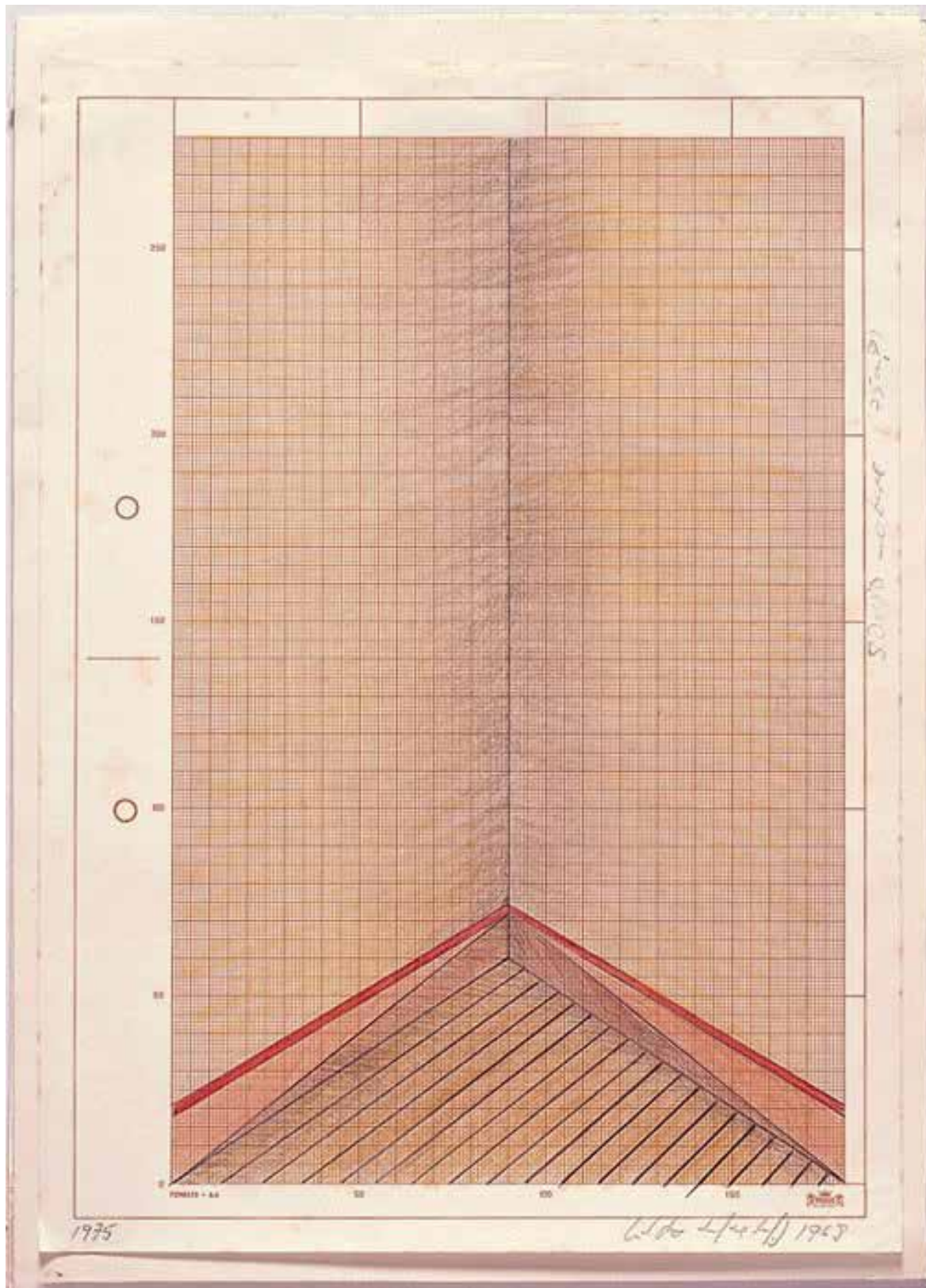


Figure 109

Example of Virtual Spaces: Corners

Meireles, C. (1968)

Available at:

[http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/styles/grid-normal-16-cols/public/images/meireles\\_virtual\\_spaces\\_corners.jpg?itok=ejBwPo4u](http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/styles/grid-normal-16-cols/public/images/meireles_virtual_spaces_corners.jpg?itok=ejBwPo4u)

(Accessed 20 December 2016)



Figure 110  
Corner IV  
Meireles, C. (1967-8/74)  
Wood, canvas, paint, woodblock flooring  
305 x100 x100



Not only did he begin to build three-dimensional pieces following his move to Rio, but he experimented intensively with other medias, started playing with the appropriation of objects, their decontextualization and transgressing by inserting artworks in spaces that did not pertain to the art system. In this period, he also taught at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM-Rio) where he participated in the Salão da Bússola [Salon of the Compass], an art competition sponsored by an advertising company whose symbol was a compass.

The competition led to an exhibition held during November and December 1969 at MAM-Rio. Although the Salão da Bússola was not thought to be experimental, it proved to be remarkable for the experimental nature of the works selected by the jury (Herkenhoff, Mosquera & Cameron, 1999). Meireles won the main prize.

In that period, from 1969 until December 1970, I was lecturing at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM) in Rio. The *Corners* were in my classroom. I entered the work on the last day at the Salão da Bússola in order to be allowed to leave the work there for a while. I ended up winning the main prize, and one of the corners remained in the museum. Throughout 1970, they would ask: 'Cildo, when are you taking this away?', I was not living at a permanent address. There was Mr. Italo, MAM's security guard who was from the Mangueira favela and used to call me 'Professor'. I was in my twenties. He would say, 'Professor, do you still need the material that is in the warehouse?' He wanted to use the material to improve his home. Hence, I gave *Corners* to him. Later on, I re-made the works. The first three disappeared. [The third was burned in a fire at the MAM.] Kynaston McShine, the curator of Information, saw the works at MAM when he visited Rio. Then, I received a letter of invitation to the exhibition in New York from him, in which Hélio Oiticica's telephone number was also written as he too had been invited. (Meireles to Menezes, 2011, p.89)

The exhibition Information held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York was just the first in a long line of great international exhibitions in which Meireles participated. These include four editions of Venice Biennials (1976, 2003, 2005 and 2009) and São Paulo Biennials (1981, 1989, 1998 and 2010); twice at the Documenta in Kassel, Germany (1992 and 2002) and two participations at the Istanbul Biennial (1999 and 2003).



For much of his career, Meireles has ranked among his country's most acclaimed artists (Brett, 2008). From expressive and later brain-twisting architectural drawings; to installations exploring materiality; and on to culturally and artistically relevant conceptual projects, his oeuvre can be characterized as multi-sensory and cerebral.

In his installations, sculptures and other objects, Meireles performs a delicately balanced dance between political and poetic approaches, which has drawn the attention of the global art scene: In 1999, the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York held Meireles' first major solo exhibition outside Brazil which travelled later to his native country. In 2008, year in which he won the Velázquez Visual Arts Prize, presented by the Ministry of Culture of Spain, a great retrospective debuted at Tate Modern in London and then travelled to the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Los Angeles County Museum of Art only finalising its tour in 2010 at the Art Gallery of Ontario. More recent solo exhibitions comprise, to cite just a few: Palacio de Velázquez in Madrid (2013), Hangar Bicocca in Milan (2014), and Museu Serralves in Porto (2014).

The lengthy list of international exhibitions makes evident the appealing power of Meireles' artworks but also the source of their strength: his artistic practice even when in 'displacement' remains indelibly impressed upon the memory of its original context. The place of materiality, memory and experience in his overall aesthetics can be located in Meireles' perception of his role as part of a creative dialogue between maker and viewer. The contextual elements that were important for their inception do not easily fade away when the artworks are displaced to a completely different environment. Thus, Meireles' artworks rarely enter into dispute with the surroundings. In fact, they are elaborated with a solid preoccupation with spatial relationships. For this reason, a curator who pays attention to every single ingredient of the artwork and who has a considerable understanding of the dynamics of post-Duchampian art would not encounter obstacles in presenting Meireles' oeuvre.

Despite the scale of his large installations, size alone cannot account for their impact. Even a tiny work such as *Southern Cross* (1969–70, figure 111) is unforgettable in many ways. This work is a small cube measuring less than 1 centimetre. Made of oak and pinewood, sacred trees to the indigenous tribes, the piece is intended to be on display on the floor of an empty gallery room. The disproportionate scale between the environment and the artwork there exhib-

ited raises awareness of the main topic behind the art object. It deals with the problematic simplification of the tragedy that the indigenous people suffered at the hands of the colonizers.

The most important aspect is not the size but the concept, such as when he inserts minor details into a monetary or an industrial system, for example, in *Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Project Coca-Cola and Banknote* (1970–76, figure 112). The first part of this artistic project consisted of sticking political messages (e.g., ‘Yankees go home’) as transfers onto Coca-Cola bottles and returning them to the Coca-Cola warehouse. The messages would only be apparent when refilled with liquid and sent out for distribution. The same system was applied to banknotes, but in this case Meireles stamped messages on the notes and introduced them immediately back into circulation. Nobody destroyed them, but also no one kept the banknotes.

Thus the flow of the artistically intervened money and its dissemination were assured. Meireles exposed his objectives with *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* in an interview to his fellow artist Antônio Manuel in 1975:

Between 1968 and 1970 I knew I was beginning to touch on something interesting. I was no longer working with metaphorical representations of situations; I was working with the real situation itself.



Figure 111  
*Southern Cross*  
Meireles, C. (1969–70)  
Available at:  
<http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/cido%20meireles%2C%20the%20southern%20cross%20%28detail%29.jpg>  
(Accessed 20 December 2016)

Furthermore, the kind of work I was making had what could be described as a 'volatilised' form. It no longer referred to the cult of the isolated object; it existed in terms of what it could spark off in the body of society. This was what one had in one's head at that time: the necessity to work with the idea of the public. Many Brazilian artists were including everyday materials and actions in their work, directing the work towards a large, indefinite number of people: what is called the public. (Meireles, 1999, p.110)

It is clear that behind the intervention performed by Meireles the central point was the encounter with the public that in this case would happen outside the art system but immersed in the exchanges made in daily life. In Meire-



Figure 112  
*Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Project Coca-Cola*  
Meireles, C. (1970–76)

les' approach there was the desire to find a unique manner to reach the public but not under traditional museum or gallery formats:

In so far as museums and galleries form a sacred space for representation, they become like the Bermuda Triangle: anything you put there, any idea, is automatically sucked in and neutralized by the context of display. I think art tries primarily to make a commitment with the public, not with the purchaser of art (the market), but with the audience sitting out there in the stalls. The shadowy presence of this envisaged audience is the most important element in the whole endeavour. One works with the possibility (that the plastic arts provide) of creating a new language to express each new idea. Always one works with the possibility of transgressing reality, to make works that do not simply exist in an approved, consecrated, sacred space: that do not happen simply in terms of a canvas, a surface, a representation. No longer working with the metaphor of gunpowder, one uses gunpowder itself. No longer concerned with the object, one is left with a practice, over which there can be no control or ownership. (Meireles, 1999, p.113)

During the development of the aforementioned project in 1970, Meireles wrote notes divided into an introduction and three different sections: Art-Culture, Insertions, Circuits and Insertion into Existing Circuits. The combination of these notes makes up a self-explanatory short essay that is genuinely relevant to grasping how Meireles' artworks can be positioned under the post-Duchampian umbrella. In his introduction, Meireles exposed certain philosophical premises of what constituted the foundations for *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*. The first reference that he made was to Duchamp. Meireles began his essay speculating that when Duchamp wanted to free art from the supremacy of technique, in his words, 'dominion of the hand' the Frenchman would not have been able to anticipate how the development of Conceptualism would affect the advancement of art by 1970. In a similar manner as professed by Oiticica (as previously commented in this chapter), Meireles argued that Duchamp's lessons have not been learnt. Meireles pointed out that what Duchamp saw as a main drawback to art was not the manual craftsmanship, but the logic that it involves. Meireles explained that Duchamp was engaged in a cause,

[...] against the gradual emotional, rational and psychological lethargy that habitual, mechanical labour inevitably produces in the individual. The struggle today should be not against the handmade but against

its logic. The fact that one's hands are not soiled with art means nothing except that one's hands are clean. Yet what one sees in much current conceptually based art is simply relief and delight at not using one's hands, as if everything were finally alright; as if at this specific moment artists did not need to start fighting against a much larger opponent: the habits and handiwork of the brain. (Meireles, 1999, p.113)

We can identify in Meireles' words a parallel thought about what Oiticica wrote, both realised that the strategy of the readymade was being superficially explored. The fact that an artist names an ordinary object as an artwork is not enough to sustain that it is a work of art:

Duchamp's intervention in the art system was in terms of the logic of the art object. Any intervention in this sphere today – given that culture, rather than an exclusive sphere of art, is now the subject – is necessarily a political intervention.' (Meireles, 1999, p.113)

Subsequently, in the second part of the text Meireles prepared a direct reference to the concept of readymade: 'Marcel Duchamp's readymades begin to indicate this anesthesia but do not act on it.' (Meireles, 1999, p.113). Next, he explained how his work would instigate a counter-point strategy to the readymade. Thus, instead of selecting an ordinary object of the world and transposing it to the art realm, Meireles would insert a piece of art into 'Existing Circuits' and 'replace the notion of a market with that of the public.' (Meireles, 1999, p.115)

This text is an earlier example of Meireles' knowledge and interpretation of Duchamp's legacy. In fact, it is easy to find numerous references to Duchamp in Meireles' writings and interviews. Another example is when he mentioned Duchamp to explain that humour stimulated the pluralism of meanings and interpretations in order to justify his habit (like Duchamp) of employing plays on words in his artworks (Herkenhoff, Mosquera & Cameron, 1999). As Brett and Todolí (2008) commented, Meireles has already openly declared that Duchamp is a primary inspiration. Meireles in his artistic practice searches for the meaning of things through different and unexpected mental circuits. Brett and Todolí (2008) observed that what can be found in Meirele's oeuvre is not what is expected but the contrary.

The simple description of what Meireles' art consists of is not enough to comprehend it. As already seen in the first chapter, the order of things in the world cannot be told unless by themselves (Foucault, 2002). Duchamp on

changing the order of things, changed their nature. In the same way, when Cildo Meireles dissects the nature of things, the Brazilian follows a homogeneous path. Scrutinizing the nature of things is to understand and alter their order. This is the limit of representation that can no longer explain the world and must let the world present itself through things. Each thing demands its own meaning and the relation system between objects is not more guided by the obviousness or the similarity (Foucault, 2002). This is an operation that Duchamp inscribed as the transition from the retina to the mind. It means that what was recorded on the retina, as a representation, must now be processed in the mind as pure presentation. Only from this mental process can things be apprehended and eventually they originate new meanings for the same things. This is the Duchampian condition that Meireles adopts as we can see in the example below:

Dark Light<sup>64</sup> 1982 is a box mounted on the wall with a panel forming a screen at one end. On this screen an apparition: the dark shape of a light bulb in the middle of a blaze of light. The image denotes light and darkness simultaneously, but in a kind of reverse relationship: what we expect to be light is dark and vice versa. Different circuits of the mind, different understanding of 'energy' and 'image' are pleasurably confused. We can leave the workings of this box a mystery, or read the artist's own description 'There are two light bulbs, one of which... is the source of light. The other bulb forms a screen through which the light will be projected [casting a shadow] onto a further screen upon which the spectator will see the image. (Brett and Todolí, 2008, p.10)

The curators continue their explanation saying that: 'Dark light is an object completely sufficient for what it demonstrates.' (Brett and Todolí, 2008, p.10). This does not mean that the object is closed in itself, in reality they imply that the artistic object opens a space of interpretation by no other means but itself. For the artist, the investigation of things exists in this paradoxical association emerged by the lack of context. To re-contextualize things by means of obviousness – light – and obscurity – darkness – is a mind operation that in the art field has contemporary roots in Duchamp. Like Duchamp, Meireles' artistic manifestations maintain a deep connection between senses and the brain, mind and body, as they do not exist separately. Mental practice requires the inclusion of the body, and this, together with the work of art defines social, geographic and physical spaces, whose orders are initiated by the artwork and its perception be-

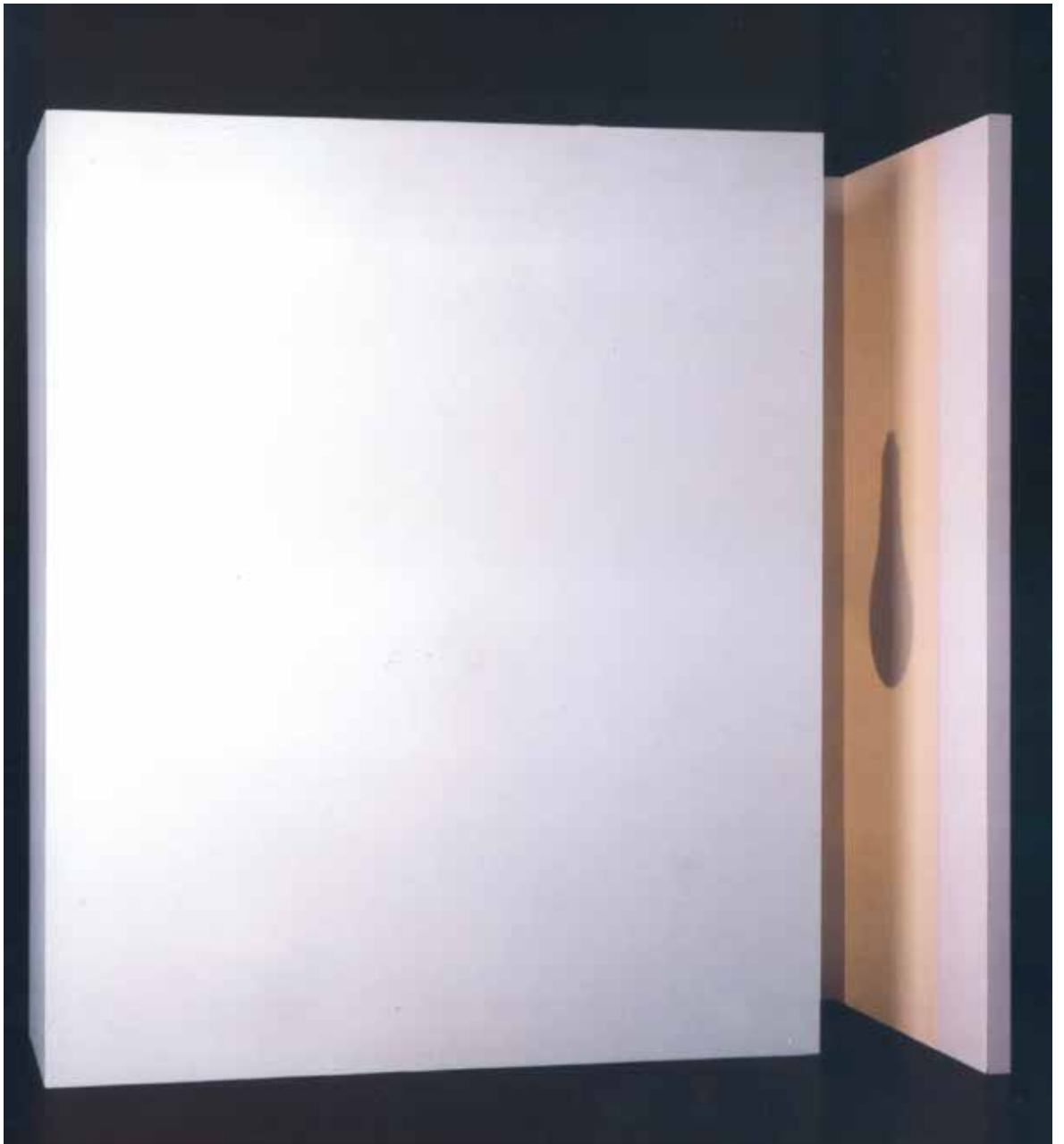


Figure 113  
Dark Light  
Meireles, C. (1982)



fore an interpretative mind. As the Brazilian curator Moacir dos Anjos described about Meireles' artwork:

To this, end, he makes use of a method of investigating the world that, instead of restricting itself to the field of retinal perception, is based on the 'synthesis between sensorial and mental relationships' to that senses and reason stimulate one another and together produce knowledge regarding complex spaces. (Anjos, 2008, p.170)

In this way, spatial perception – and this issue is central to curatorial procedures generated by Duchamp – is defined by each event, each presentation, which becomes singular insofar that it no longer gives a ready discourse, but is something constantly open to interpretation. The space is inaugurated by the artwork. However, the space effectively is in the mind of the observer, not as a given fact, but as a discourse to be built. The artwork does not represent, in the figurative sense of the term, the artwork shows possibilities. Duchamp reissues or comes close to the platonic<sup>65</sup> ideal of a society where thinking, the mental, is processed through pure forms, not mimetic ones. Meireles' art takes advantage of this concept in its investigation into the nature of things. The artist's *modus operandi* becomes clear when we perceive that his work: 'gradually reveals the working of the perceptual/philosophical/ethical proposition, a modern allegory rooted in the material world' (Brett and Todolí, 2008, p.11). Meireles's interest in investigating space and the artwork's mental construction justifies the choice as an artist to discuss post-Duchampian curatorial procedures.

### **3.4 CURATING POST-DUCHAMPIAN ART IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT**

This thesis will trace a map of two different attempts at relocating post-Duchampian artworks, thus this chapter expands on the relationships between the theory developed so far and exhibitions focusing on the Brazilian artists Oiticica and Meireles. It shall examine curatorial operations to comprehend how post-Duchampian practices redefined and continue to redefine the semantic aspects of art. It is observed that when a work of art is subjected to transnational displacement the foremost issues raised by this study become more noticeable.

The principles involved in Duchamp's artworks and ideas have been discussed, leading to a subsequent in-depth examination of Duchamp's function as a pioneer curator. Thus, this critical analysis now unfolds itself into the examination of exhibitions in which post-Duchampian characteristics can be identified. Therefore, to accomplish this ultimate objective it shall review two

events that took place at Tate Modern in London. The first comprises the two exhibitions dedicated to Hélio Oiticica from 19 May to 21 October 2007, the retrospective *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour* and the show *Oiticica in London – Tate Collection*, and the second is the show named *Cildo Meireles* that ran from 14 October 2008 to 11 January 2009 at the same museum.

Tate Modern was inaugurated in 2000 as a response to the need realized by its board of trustees to have a place to exhibit international modern and contemporary art, independent of the Tate Britain in Millbank<sup>66</sup>, the first building mainly designed to house British artworks (Cork, 1973). The discussion about a new building had been a hot topic between the museum's curators, patrons and artists since the 1970s when the Tate Collection began to acquire artworks linked to conceptual art (Menezes, 2006). This new building was supposed to be versatile and answers to the need of an emergent mode of exhibition-making and curatorial practice that were not only about attaching paintings to the wall or safekeeping an artwork (Cork, 1973). For this reason, the former Bankside Power station facing the Thames River was chosen (Menezes, 2006). The large construction transformed into a museum provides a completely different experience from visiting the former Tate Gallery. The idea of the museum as a large open-plan space allowed an improvement in the exhibition-making with multiple possibilities of subdivisions for each arrangement of the collection and temporary exhibitions. The architecture constitutes the most visible modification in terms of a policy of display but is not the only aspect that distinguishes the museum. The implementation of a curatorial conception that was more related to a critical mediation with the public activated by the Tate Modern curatorial team became a model for other museums as it provides some important guide-

66 In 1889, the industrialist Henry Tate offered his collection of art created by compatriot artists, to the National Gallery. However, the directors of the National Gallery could not accept because there was not adequate space to keep them. The rejection consequently precipitated a campaign in favour of the construction of a National Gallery for British Art. The site chosen to erect the building was the place where the Millbank Penitentiary was demolished in 1890. The choice took into account the view of the Thames River. The campaign involved scholars, politicians and a number of enthusiasts from the London elite, but it came as no surprise, years later, that the main anonymous donor to the new gallery was Henry Tate. The National Gallery of British Art opened its doors in 1897 subordinated to the National Gallery. While the National Gallery covered art from all ages and nations, the new gallery was in charge of promoting art made by British artists born after 1790. In 1932, it changed its name to Tate Gallery, but the museum only became totally independent from the National Gallery two decades later. It was in this period that it began to change its policy to collect international artworks. In 1992, the Tate Gallery joined the list of the nineteen national museums funded by the British Government through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Recently, the original building in Millbank changed its name again to Tate Britain after the inauguration of Tate Modern in 2000. Tate Collection as an institution is also composed of Tate Liverpool (since 1985) and Tate St Ives (since 1993). (Tate Collection, n.d.)`

lines in order to facilitate the aesthetic experience, and in this sense goes well beyond conventional display formats and labels. The commentary on the pieces, thematic links and videos, placards and documents reconstitute the generative motivation of each artist in making the pieces on display at Tate exhibitions. This brief description of the museum's characteristics helps us understand that Tate Modern established the groundwork to show a global perspective of the art world and having this purpose, it was an appropriate institution to receive the transnational exhibitions that we will study.

As we have already seen in this chapter, Oiticica's legacy challenges curators and in the year 2007, Tate Modern took on the task of creating a cohesive structure in which to show and discuss his oeuvre. Taken together, the two exhibitions that presented Oiticica to the British public conveyed a portrait of the artist and his works, depicting a formalist approach that leans towards playful experiments. In *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour*, curator Mari Carmen Ramírez arranged a view of Oiticica's works distinct from the typical discourses circulating about him in Europe. She noted that since his first major touring exhibition in 1992<sup>67</sup> the 'iconoclastic' and 'highly original' sides of his artistic persona became the main discussion about Oiticica. Her intention, however, was to give emphasis to what she considered a hidden facet:

The emphasis on the artist as rebel, however, has conveniently obscured other aspects of Oiticica's personality and production that have only recently come to the surface, demanding equal attention. In reality, the *poète maudit* coexisted with the methodical intellectual, intuitive researcher, and consummate artistic practitioner. For a lack of better word, I will refer to this aspect of his double-edged creative persona as the 'systematic' side of Hélio's imprint. Anyone who has analysed the structure of a single work by Oiticica or who has delved into this extensive archives can attest to the meticulous craftsmanship, rigorous planning, fastidious record keeping, and ongoing reflection that guided both this deft praxis and theoretical incisiveness. (Ramírez, 2007, p.17)

67 This exhibition, which was organized by Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam in association with Projeto Hélio Oiticica from Brazil and the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris, was not only on display in the aforementioned museums but also at Fundación Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, Centro de Arte Moderna of the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon and the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis in the United States. A team of Oiticica's specialists produced the catalogue and curatorial endeavour: Guy Brett, Catherine David, Chris Dercon, Luciano Figueiredo and Lygia Pape. (Ramírez, 2007)

Ramírez gathered 150 works and focused on the visual aspects of his creations, particularly Oiticica's expansive handling of colour. In many ways, Ramírez's curatorial project was innovative but it tended to eclipse the dimensional complexity of Oiticica's artistic goals. Most of the works in *The Body of Colour* were gouaches on paper and paintings. The display began with two-dimensional works and moved onto spatial objects. The exhibition conceived colour in Oiticica's works as the means for him to attain space perception. The discussion did not project colour as a kind of chromatic grammar nor raised questions related to the characteristics of Oiticica's palette. In fact, the embodiment of colour as a dimensional property was the point.

From the very beginning, Hélio considered colour to be a fully autonomous system that had remained far too long subordinate to the pictorial support. As such, colour had its own spatial and temporal dimension that could only be appreciated when released from the plane. *Liberated into space*, colour took on a 'body', as he wrote in 1960. This theoretical insight was developed in several related series of works that unfold in dialectical sequence, thus encompassing everything from the metaphysical to the social experience of colour. (Ramírez, 2007, p.20)

When influenced by the Brazilian Concrete Movement, Oiticica created artworks, like any other artist that dealt with Constructivism, by addressing abstract geometrical forms and how they could represent universal ideas. Nevertheless, colour and not shapes was his foremost focus of attention. For him 'Colour is the first revelation of the world' (Oiticica cited in Ramírez, 2007, p.15). The works in *gauche* on cardboard explored the relation between geometric forms and chromatic elements. The *Metaesquema* subtitled *Red Going through White* (1958, figure 114), for instance, displays a collection of red rectangles combined in a pattern. The painted structure is not closed and reveals an irregular, cardboard coloured grid created from the background of the paper and the 'hollows' between the rectangles. The expressivity of this example of *Metaesquema* is accomplished by the emptiness in the structure rather than by the physicality of the painted objects.

In the exhibition, alongside the *Metaesquem*as series one could find the display of the *Bilateral* (1959, figure 115) group of works. In this latter series, Oiticica's forms and colours can be seen in paintings and on objects suspended in the room in which they are displayed. The artist's gestures were repeated in different

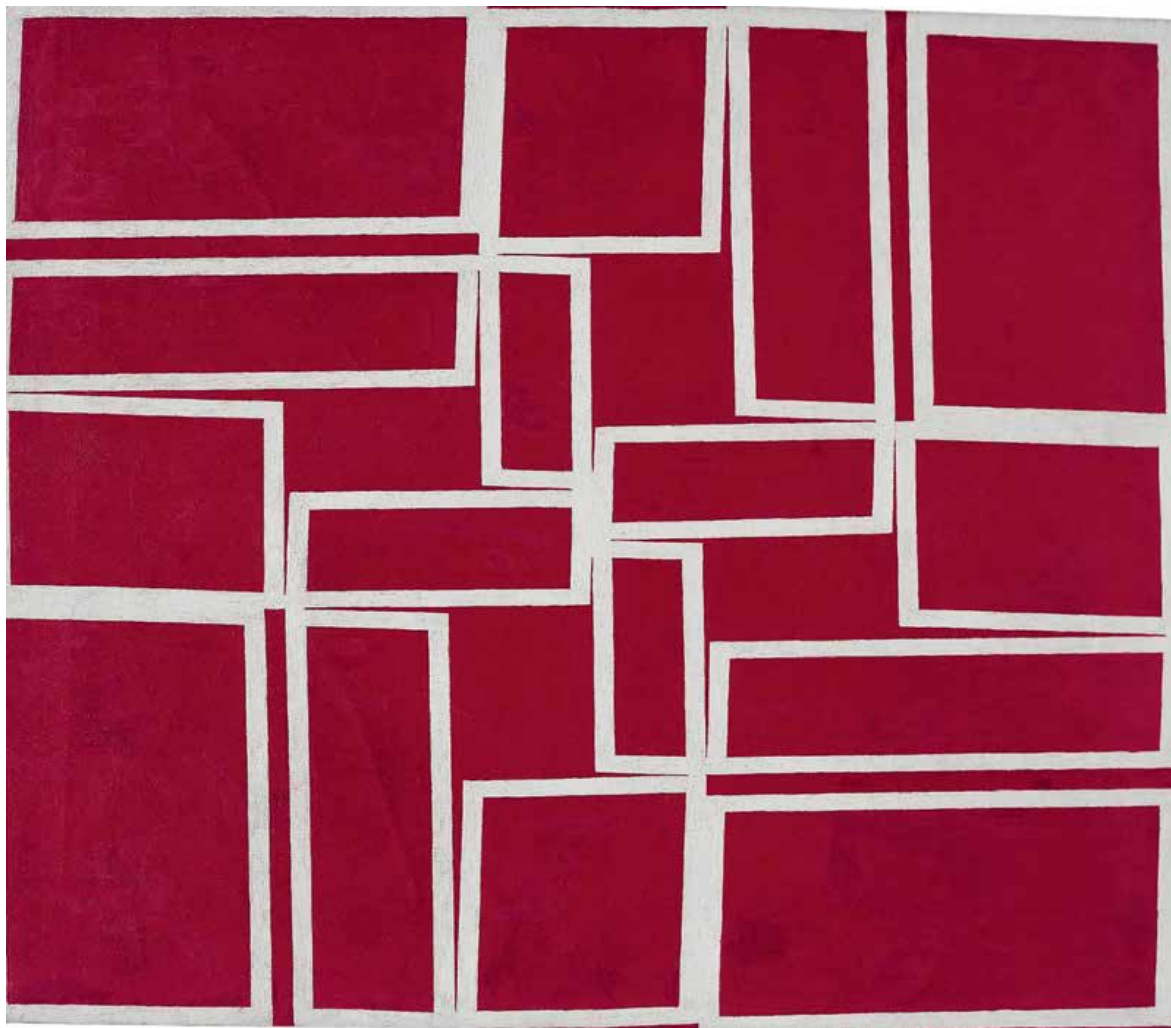


Figure 114  
 Metaesquema - Red Going through White  
 Oiticica, H. (1958)  
 Available at:  
[http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/helio\\_oiticica\\_metaesquema.jpg](http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/helio_oiticica_metaesquema.jpg)  
 (Accessed 10 December 2016)

dimensions at the same time: as flat images on the walls as well as on geometric plates of wood that hung from the ceiling and were placed orthogonally to each other, defining different planes and, consequently, creating different images. The slight gradation of white and beige conveyed the impression of depth and spatial property through the shading effect. The *Bilateral* group led into the *Spatial Reliefs* series (1960, figure 116). These artworks were still concerned with geometrical forms and colour but were no longer related to Oiticica's paintings. *Spatial Reliefs* are red or yellow plywood cut into geometric shapes that hung from the gallery's ceiling. Visitors were able to walk through the set and affect the space around the works by their personal displacement in the room. These are the aesthetic games proposed by Oiticica. Once again, it is not the objects that impart the aesthetic play but, rather, the invisible dimensional structure that exists in relation to them.



Figure 115  
Bilateral  
Oiticica, H. (1959)

The curator presented a narrative in order that it might appear that these works were the next logical step in Oiticica's process of spatial exploration through the use of colour. Nevertheless, for him it was not a matter of merely increasing the number of dimensions. When Oiticica was making his art on paper or canvas, he was already experimenting with expanding spatial potential through colour. In fact, all his spatial investigations were born from a very specific objective: a desire to achieve a sensorial experience for the viewer.

The notion of aesthetic play, that we have discussed before, is one in which the viewer will have a more activate role. The viewer is the player, the 'participator' as Oiticica often preferred.

It is important not to forget that one of the postulates of the Neoconcrete group was the *Non-object Theory*, which was first published in 1959 in the *Suplemento Dominical*, the Sunday cultural supplement of *Jornal do Brasil*, one of the most important Brazilian news-papers at the time, as a contribution to the second Neoconcrete exhibition. Written by the poet and art critic Ferreira Gullar, the text compiled the main thoughts that were guiding the artistic group. The



Figure 116  
Spatial Reliefs  
Oiticica, H. (1960)



*Non-object Theory* defined a 'non-object' as an object that intends to be a pure appearance (Asbury, 2005). Under this premise, art manifestation is considered to be the synthesis of the sensorial and mental experiences that perception can permit. As a member of Grupo Frente, the most innovative tendency within the Brazilian Neoconcrete Movement, Oiticica embraced this concept. His study of colour fostered this aim. For the artist, any colour was a kind of universal language with which he could 'activate' a space, not just through visual impression, but mainly by highlighting the object's position in space. Oiticica wanted to stimulate other senses that could raise the state of consciousness by making a viewer more aware of himself or herself as a relevant entity in the space.

In the two-dimensional artworks, Oiticica manipulated perception by giving space precedence over the singular entities, by conferring movements to his forms and by distinguishing his purpose with colours. Later, with the interactive sculpture series *Bólides* (1963-1965, figure 106 and 107), he provoked bodily responses, gathering a variety of materials that were to be revealed by the public. When the *Bólides* were produced, they were mostly small boxes, constructed with drawers or divisions that could be touched, smelled and sometimes listened to. For example, *Bólido number 16* (1965-1966, figure 117) is a coloured wooden box containing glass, charcoal and beach shells. Nevertheless, at the Tate, the public was not allowed to touch the *Bólides*, but the works were kept open to allow viewers to see what was inside each one. In this case, they were only viewers not 'participators' Oiticica would say.

The two last rooms of the show displayed Oiticica's *Grand Nucleus* (1960, figure 118). The conglomerate of more than 30 pieces of fibreboards in different shades of yellow appeared to be floating. Rectangles and squares hung from the ceiling and placed orthogonally to each other were 'drawn' in the air. Like the *Bilaterals* and the *Space Reliefs*, this work employs the position of the viewer as a key to realizing Oiticica's purposes. An aesthetic play of shifting between three-dimensional and two-dimensional images is generated by real physical depth as well as by changes in colour to some extent from a lighter to a darker yellow. In the same room, the single example of Oiticica's *Penetrables* – square, man-sized cabins that one can enter – was not as convincing as it might have been; the idea is that once inside the cabin, one could alter the position of the two doors that crossed the box. It did not work properly.

This was true, as well, for the famous *Parangolés*, the colourful capes made for wearing that became Oiticica's trademark. They were in the show but



Figure 117  
Box Bólíde 16  
Oiticica, H. (1965-66)  
Oil with polyvinyl acetate emulsion on wood; glass; charcoal; beach shells



Figure 118  
*Grand Nucleus*  
 Oiticica, H. (1960)  
 Oil and resin on wood fibreboard  
 6.7 x 9.75 m

could not be worn. Consequently, they lost their strength. The curator did not reveal the rules of this aesthetic game. They were hung on hangers attached to the walls in a room that was also the site of a screening of the 1979 film *HO*, directed by the Brazilian filmmaker Ivan Cardoso, who was a close friend of Oiticica's. In *HO*, Oiticica appears dancing wearing the *Parangolés* and discusses his interests and objectives. Hence, the public had an idea of what the proposal was of the 'hang-gliders to ecstasy' but it was like reading the rules of a game but later realising that the pieces to play were missing.

Regarding Oiticica's artworks through a formalist lens, Ramírez provided a certain kind of organization that was not completely in sync with the Brazilian artist's process. She proposed an evolutionary line in her curatorial approach in which she made it seem that the works on paper evolved until reaching the *Parangolés*. Nevertheless, the works can also be perceived as examples of an ongoing investigation, not merely as a progression towards the sensorial. By comparison, *Grand Nucleus* has elements that can be found in the early abstract

paintings but in a general manner, in Oiticica's work, the creation of space by colours is presented in different procedures. Moreover, by creating an evolutionary line, the curator 'disciplined' the transformation in Oiticica's artworks.

On one hand, Ramírez's frame did provide a way to discuss Oiticica's development as an artist and his role as a thinker. On the other hand, visitors probably noticed that no mention was made of the political issues that were so important to Oiticica. It seems as if the artist who sought liberation was captured inside the museum, petrified behind the window glass. Considering Oiticica's stance against any type of standardisation, this was unfortunate.

This critique emerges from the notion of exhibition-making incorporated in this thesis and the definition of curating that it brings about. According to Storr, to whom exhibition-maker and curator have similar connotations, but are not the same, the basics of an exhibition are:

The primary means for 'explaining' an artist's work is to let it reveal itself. Showing is telling. Space is the medium in which ideas are visually phrased. Installation is both presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation. Galleries are paragraphs, the walls and formal subdivisions of the floor are sentences, cluster of works are clauses, and individual works, in varying degree, operate as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and often as more than one of these functions according to their context. Ordinary people are sensitive to their surrounding and what is in them if you let them be. Based on the basic aptitude they are or can become visually literate if you lead them into and through spaces filled with things in a manner that encourages them to heed the clues they are consciously or subliminally picking up – clues that the exhibition maker has left for them. (Storr, 2003, p.5)

If showing is telling, the communication intended by Ramírez had an aspect missing. It was more a solo discourse than a conversation. Additionally, as far as curating is concerned, Ramírez did not reveal all the elements that composed Oiticica's oeuvre since she left out the political aspects of Oiticica's thoughts, its primary context. Interaction with the public was non-existent, which was one of the pivotal features of some works by Oiticica. Thus, considering curating as a separate activity from exhibition-making, Ramírez did indeed

put on a good exhibition, all the basics of making a great exhibition were present, but she did not introduce a curatorial strategy that embraces the dynamics of post-Duchampian art.

In counter-point, to commemorate the time that Oiticica spent in London, Tate prepared Oiticica in London as an adjunct to the main exhibition. Ramírez's art historical approach was balanced by a look at the revolutionary and singular nature of Oiticica's vision. Curated by Guy Brett and Tanya Barson, the show encompassed works in five rooms, including some in the Tate's collection by artists who participated in the Signals project. Founded in 1964, this project, also a gallery, was a meeting place for British and foreign artists, run by a group of avant-garde artists and intellectuals<sup>68</sup> (Whitelegg, 2007).

One of the five rooms dedicated to Oiticica in London contained the artist's installation *Tropicália* (1967, figure 119), a labyrinthine oasis with sand, coloured parrots, tents and *Penetrables* with a television inside exhibiting a TV channel. The work, which was acquired by the Tate Collection, is considered the turning point in Oiticica's oeuvre. It explores a confrontation between representative images and the sensory effects produced by materials and sounds. The installation was made at the start of the *Tropicália* movement, in which Oiticica participated. A response to political dictatorship, the movement encompassed popular music and the arts in Brazil and was considered to be revolutionary in its scope and aspirations<sup>69</sup>. To view *Tropicália*, the public had to queue up to enter this multi-sensory experience. If visitors had not, by this point, gained a complete grasp of Oiticica's range as an artist, *Tropicália* may just have opened a window into the artist's vision of total participation gained through liberation from established concepts, labels and perceptions and cultural clichés.

To continue our investigation, we now turn our attention to the retrospective exhibition of Meireles that took place after that of Oiticica, in the same exhibition space in London. For this contemporary Brazilian artist's first major exhibition in Europe, Tate Modern created a warehouse-sized open space by removing the interior walls of one of its largest display areas in order to showcase some of the largest installations by an international artist ever shown at the museum. Approximately 70,000 visitors from home and abroad queued up to await

68 It includes Brazilian artists Sergio Camargo, Lygia Clark and Mira Schendel; Venezuelan artist Jesus Soto; Chinese artist Li Yuan-Chia; and Philippine artist David Medalla.

69 Although the movement was squashed by the military regime and many of its participants went into exile, its interdisciplinary influence on music, art, theater and fashion has been acknowledged around the world (Basualdo, 2005)



Figure 119  
*Tropicália*  
 Oiticica, H. (1967)  
 Mixed media

their turn to view the eight large-scale installations and more than 40 works including sculptures, drawings and other objects.

Meireles considers that the materiality of his works embodies his ideas. His sharp perception and precise artistic practice can be compared to the creative process of a storyteller. He uses a diversity of means to evoke an atmosphere and establish the foundations from which narratives emerge (Brett, 2008). In the case of the Tate exhibition, the stories which emerged from his large installations were empowered due to the absence of barriers separating the different artworks. The curatorial team consisting of the Tate Modern Director Vicente Todolí, Assistant Curator Amy Dickson and independent curator Guy Brett highlighted the complementary nature of Meireles's works to reveal the overlapping dialogues the artist orchestrates in his works.

The imposing presences of *Eureka/Blindhotland* (1970-1975, figure 120), *Glovetrotter* (1991, figure 121), *Through* (1983-1989, figure 122) and *Missions/How to Build Cathedrals* (1987, figure 123) opened the show and gave those unfamiliar with the artist's oeuvre an indication of his depth and scale. *Eureka/Blindhotland* is a multi-sensory installation beckoning viewers into a space demarcated by a





Figure 120  
Eureka/Blindhotland  
Meireles, C. (1970-1975)  
Available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/meireles-eureka-blindhotland-t12605>  
(Accessed 20 December 2016)



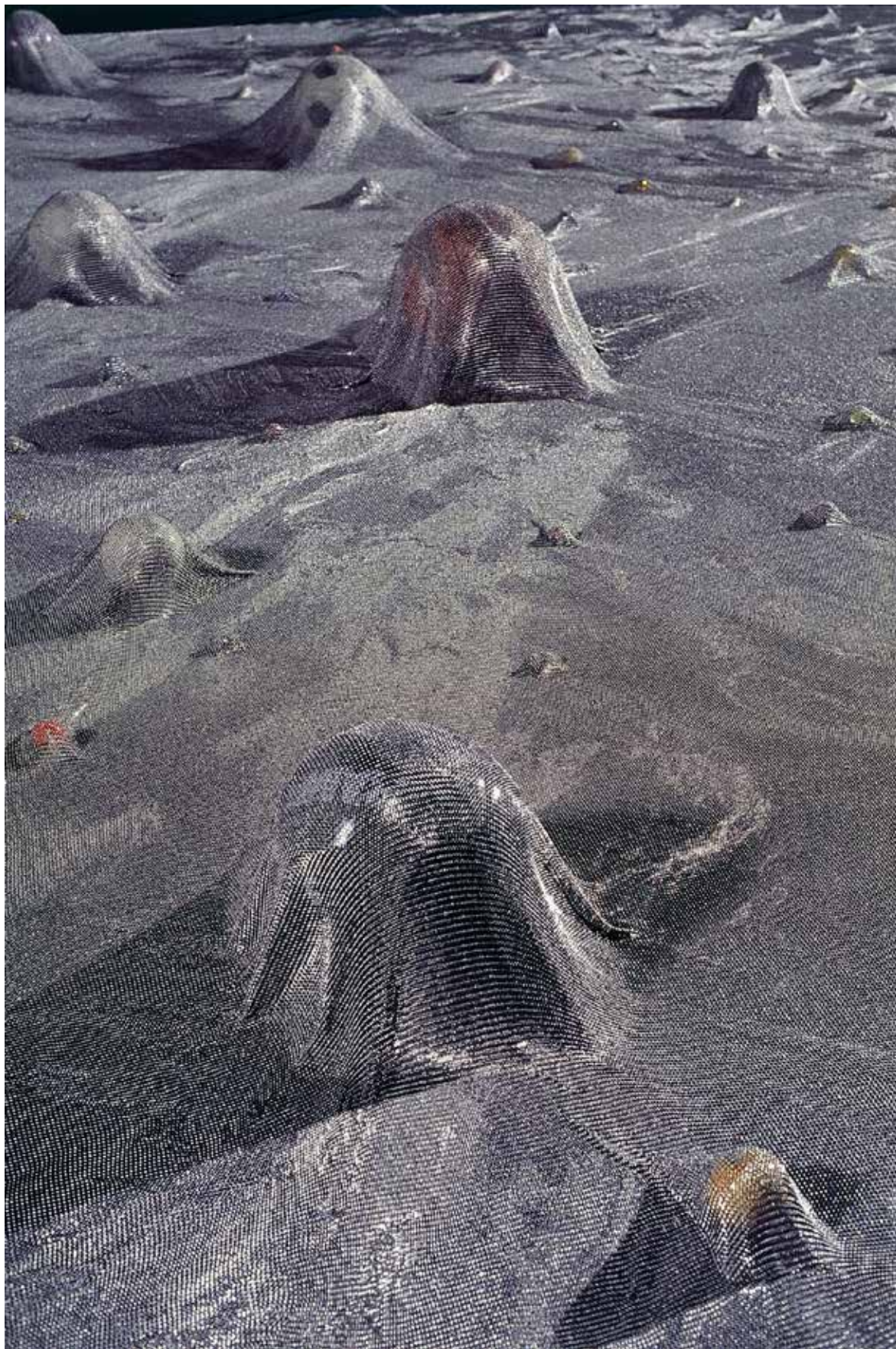


Figure 121  
*Glovetrotter*  
Meireles, C. (1991)  
Steel mesh, balls of various sizes, materials and colours  
520 x 420 cm





Figure 122  
 Through  
 Meireles, C. (1983–9/2008)  
 Piece includes – Cellophane, aquarium, chicken wire, fishing nets, voile, glass, iron fencing  
 600 x 1500 x 1500 cm



Figure 123  
 Mission/Missions (How to Build Cathedrals)  
 Meireles, C. (1987)  
 Approximately 600,000 coins, 800 communion wafers, 2,000 bones, 80 paving stones and black fabric  
 235 x 600 x 600 cm

fishing net. An illuminated set of scales and hundreds of identical spheres set on the floor could be seen inside the space. The sound of balls bouncing could be heard coming from the background. The visual features and resonant sounds encouraged those inside to pick up the spheres on the ground, thereby revealing perplexing disparities of weight. The spheres looked the same but were made of different materials. In *Eureka/Blindhotland*, the artist questioned the conventions of empirical reality by exploring notions of relativity and unpredictability. The work playfully revived the ancient experiment conducted by the Greek scientist Archimedes (287-212 BC), who is famous for exclaiming 'Eureka!' when he discovered how to calculate the weight of irregular bodies (Brett, 2008).

The sound of the bouncing balls reverberated through the exhibition space until the visitors arrived at a 5.2 x 4.2-metre piece of stainless-steel mesh on the floor, which composes *Glovetrotter*. Under the mesh, Meireles created a planetary system with spheres of diverse sizes, seemingly made from materials as diverse as basketballs and pearls. The modular capacity of the medieval-like textile showed the contours of the balls but did not reveal them entirely. Meireles explained that the title alludes to 'the great voyages of the modern age' (Meireles quoted in Brett, 2008, p.160). But in this universe, where a heavy interlocking net captured the spheres, there is an odd 'orbit':

The mesh imposes itself. A dialogue could well happen in this piece. I thought of people entering it and changing the configuration. Whenever I showed the work, I imposed no restrictions, but the spectators walked around the work so respectfully! In early exhibitions at which I mounted this work, it had a room all to itself. So I thought: I'll spare them! (Meireles cited in Brett, 2008, p.160).

According to the artist, it is a clear example of how the contact with the public can add new meanings to the work and the history of the artwork display can change the artwork itself. He said that the surface of the artwork suggests 'tactility' however in the end the mesh was not inviting. He soon understood that the configuration was not allowing the freedom that would be necessary for the aesthetic play. Thus, he decided to modify the rules of the aesthetic game. Consequently, the *Glovetrotter* transformed itself into an installation in which the visitor would only orbit around the piece but not on it. Bearing that in mind, similar to *Eureka*, *Glovetrotter* pursued a sensorial experience that dealt with the idea that 'what you see is not what is shown' (Brett, 2008). In the case of the delineated spheres immobilised by the exquisite metal fabric, the artist also pro-

vided a synesthetic effect, suggesting that someone could have tactile perceptions using their sense of sight. The same effect was explicit in the wall-hanging sculpture, *Blind Mirror* (1970, figure 124); in this work, a white frame resembling a bathroom mirror encloses grey mastic gum. Most likely, many viewers would have felt impelled to stick their hands into the amorphous surface and give a volumetric aspect to the 'reflected' image: 'Blind Mirror was fundamentally about making a mirror that would meet the representational or mirroring needs of a blind person. [...] the 'image' took place through touch instead of through gaze.' (Meireles cited in Brett, 2008, p.106).

*Through* is a 225-square metre-long labyrinth of corridors divided by materials ranging from mosquito and tennis nets to aquariums, chicken wires and chain barriers that block the passage, but permit one to see what is beyond. In the centre of the installation was a six-metre-high cellophane ball. In order to reach the giant globular structure, viewers must walk on a glass path. The work recalled legendary mazes and heroic paths present throughout Western literature (Brett, 2008). With every step taken, the glass cracks more and more noisily, leaving a route of broken fragments to follow. *Through* plays upon a tension between fear and delight. Even though one could see through the barriers, it was necessary for those who wanted to travel the path to remain alert while walking. The contrasting properties of the different materials acted in counterpoint to the transparency intrinsic to the entire artwork. When asked about his creative process, Meireles told the story behind *Through* to exemplify how he build his artworks:

I intend to associate it with a bolt of lightning. In short: in the first moment, something crosses your brain. It does not have a colour, shape, function, anything. It is simply a fact, a germ, a strangeness. That is how *Through* was conceived. I was opening a package of something. I took the cellophane paper, scrunched it up, put it in the bin and went back to what I had been doing. Suddenly, I started hearing a tiny noise, the paper was moving. I had seen it countless times in my life but for some reason at that specific moment, I imagined a succession of things, a chain of obstacles that was related to the idea of a soft glass, live glass, and at the same time it was something that crosses. So, after making the associations, you start to detail, to understand what you want to reach. (Meireles to Menezes, 2011, p.91)

Although they are not illustrative, each element composing Meireles' installations unravels parables and tales as if to test the audience's ability

to discover meaning. Establishing a strong poetry of substances, this seductive approach taken by the curatorial project enlisted viewers to evoke narratives by using their senses and perception. The curatorship thus merges each person's contribution to the artist/viewer dialogue with his or her own thematic preoccupations. In *Missions/How to Build Cathedrals* he brought to the exhibition space a specific moment in Brazilian colonial history. Its breath-taking composition is related to the encounter between indigenous tribes and colonizers. At Tate, the artwork's base is a massive rug of thousands of coins. For this exhibition in England, the curators used British pennies to impart an even more local awareness. About 2.5 metres above a perfect bronze square, the artist suspended another square comprised of approximately 2,000 dangling bones. A delicate central column made of 800 communion hosts connects the base and the pendulous mortal remains above. Meireles created the installation for a group exhibition on the 300 years of Jesuit settlements founded in southern Brazil between 1610 and 1767. The missions, as the settlements were called, aimed to evangelise and convert native peoples (Morais, 2004). Meireles conducted a critical review of this historical episode in which an entire indigenous population was forced to renounce their beliefs and integrate with a society ruled by Christian doctrines. The artist not only guided his allusive interpretation, but also opened the aesthetic experience to other perceptions. In his words, he used the components of *Missions/How to Build Cathedrals* 'not as symbols but as matters' (Morais, 2004, p.113). In effect, Meireles and curators allowed viewers to become participants-players and beyond that they could also become archaeologists given an opportunity to decipher his installation or fill it with multiple meanings, as for example, adding the significance that the British pounds can give to this context.

In the retrospective at Tate, a major facet of the artist's aesthetics was as transparent as Duchamp's *Large Glass*. This aspect is how Meireles attaches narratives to his works and so moves them from a physical into a conceptual realm. In this sense, the first piece on view at Tate exemplified the spirit of the entire display. Placed at the entrance to the exhibition, *Liverbeatlespool* (2004, figure 125) consists of the 27 songs by the Beatles that reached the number 1 position in the charts in the U.K. or the U.S. Joined in this way, the songs compressed a sonority, which gave a sense of physical appearance to the musical chords. Visitors could listen with headphones to over 14 minutes of indistinguishable sounds. Displayed together on a wall, the lyrics formed a column of unfocused sentences. The multiplicity of voices of this sound-visual-sculpture reflected an instance



Figure 124

*Blind Mirror*

Meireles, C. (1970)

Available at:

[http://thewarehousedallas.org/sites/default/files/styles/gallery\\_images/public/meireles\\_blindmirror1970.jpg?itok=4\\_V3S5zY](http://thewarehousedallas.org/sites/default/files/styles/gallery_images/public/meireles_blindmirror1970.jpg?itok=4_V3S5zY)

(Accessed 20 December 2016)

of curatorial choice as well as an overall method. Undoubtedly, the selection of pieces contributed to the exchange of stories among Meireles's vast production: layers and layers of meanings coming together in the same place, contribute to the aesthetic experience of Meireles' artworks and also point a way forward to a new understanding of curatorial operations that are beyond mere 're-presentation' and in many aspects follow Duchamp's curatorial 'testament'.



## The Ballad of John and Yoko

Standing in the park at Southampton  
 Trying to get to Holland or France.  
 The man in the park said you've got to go back,  
 You know they're waiting for you, a chance.  
 It's been a hard day's night,  
 I should be sleeping like a log,  
 But when I get home to you,  
 I find the things that you do.  
 Christ, you know it ain't easy,  
 You know how hard it can be.  
 The way things are going,  
 They're going to crucify me.  
 Jojo was a loner  
 In Penny Lane, he was a loner  
 Of John and Yoko, he didn't know.  
 Ooh I need you, I need you, it's true,  
 Hope you'll need me, I need you,  
 Do I need you, I need you?  
 Dear John, I need you.  
 Just call me, I need you.  
 I don't think I can live without you.  
 Eleanor Rigby, she's a loner,  
 But now she's a mother,  
 Nothing's the same,  
 Now I have a home, a door,  
 Waits for you, I need you.  
 The way things are going,  
 They're going to crucify me.  
 I don't think I can live without you.  
 Father McKenzie, he's a loner,  
 She's a mother, she's a mother,  
 Look at him, he's a mother,  
 Ooh I need you, I need you, it's true,  
 Many times, I need you,  
 Anything, I need you,  
 I don't think I can live without you.  
 Tried to get to Holland or France,  
 Oh boy, when you're a mother,  
 Eleanor Rigby, she's a mother,  
 In Penny Lane, he was a loner,  
 Father McKenzie, he's a loner,  
 But now she's a mother,  
 I don't think I can live without you.  
 I don't think I can live without you.  
 I don't think I can live without you.  
 All you need is love, all you need is love,  
 There's a love that goes beyond, beyond,  
 For you and me, for you and me,  
 Eight days a week, eight days a week,  
 There's a love that goes beyond, beyond,  
 And I've been waiting like a dog,  
 Caught in a trap, caught in a trap,  
 It's been a hard day's night,  
 I should be sleeping like a log,  
 The man in the park said you've got to go back,  
 You know they're waiting for you, a chance.  
 It's good to have you back,  
 Christ, you know it ain't easy,  
 Will make me feel alright,  
 You know how hard it can be.  
 The way things are going,  
 They're going to crucify me.

Figure 125  
 Liverbeatlespool  
 Meireles, C. (2004)



# Conclusion

I next asked Duchamp how he felt about all the elaborate, often arcane interpretations of his work. 'I learned a lot from them' he laughed. Then, more seriously: 'You see, I do believe in the mediumistic role of the artist. What's written about him gives him a way of learning about himself. The artist's accomplishment is never the same as the viewer's interpretation. When they explain all those documents in the *Green Box*, they are right to decide what they want to do with it. A work of art is dependent on the explosion made by the onlooker. It goes to the Louvre because of the onlookers.' (Duchamp to Ashton, 1966, p.245)

It is tempting for an art historian to adopt a systematic model or to elaborate a guide in which one can find definitions that will circumscribe artistic manifestations. Although this effort is plainly impractical and it is unrealistic to believe that verbal descriptions will limit the ongoing and intangible process that distinguishes the art making, it is nevertheless still very tempting. The germinal aspiration of this doctoral research was the search for an organizational grammar to deal with contemporary art and subsequently its communication with the public in the exhibition space. Its targets were the contemporary definition of curating and a reflection upon the challenges encountered in the current curatorial practice. As an art historian and a curator myself, I was allured to assemble with words what is sometimes only translatable by artistic expression.

Thus, I firstly set out this research to determine what would be the criterion, the principles or standard by which one could define contemporary art, and to better apprehend which type of art from our days would fall within this scope, I worked with the term post-Duchampian art. This label facilitated the comprehension that we would, over the course of this thesis, address the art that is not merely 'morphologically' art, as Kosuth (2003) pretentiously arbitrated before writing that all art after Duchamp would be conceptual.

The milieu of post-Duchampian art and its transitive features were glimpsed (obviously not using this phrase) in the interview by *Studio International*, that opens this conclusion, that Duchamp gave later in his life in 1966, coin-

cidentally or not, the same year that he secretly finished *Étant Donnés*. When the interviewer, Dore Ashton, asked Duchamp about the fact that the new generation of artists regarded him as a father, he laughed again and explained how it had been previously, when retinal art was predominant:

The whole century since 1880 works in retinal terms, only sensuous feeling [sic]. It's like a bath. I got out of the bath. [...] There never was a programme with me, though. I never decided not to be retinal so clearly. I don't say my way is the only way of doing things. Art is a condition, a Heraclitan condition of always changing, isn't it? (Duchamp to Ashton, 1966, p.245)

When Duchamp mentioned a 'Heraclitan condition' he might have been referring to the Greek philosopher's quote that says that ever-newer waters flow on those who step into the same river, and if art has this character it precisely means that art never remains still. Thus, the desire to condense contemporary art into a fixed definition is already a perpetual-motion exercise. Nevertheless, this thesis found in the historical and theoretical framework a suggestion of a possible solution to configure this fluctuating object of study that is the current state of art. The reading of Bauman presented the social and historical circumstances that he firstly named postmodern turn<sup>70</sup>. For Bauman this was the phase that emerged due to modernity's failure in over rationalizing the world and the denial of the modern thought concerning society's ability to constantly change.

According to the framework that this thesis introduced, despite the modern beliefs in certitudes and its Cartesian rationality, society went through radical changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These changes produced undeletable transformations in the manner we perceive the world and had a powerful impact on culture. I encountered in Foucault the development of this argument by inspecting the book *The Order of Things*. Hence, upon understanding Duchamp's legacy by means of a Foucauldian perspective, one can also advocate that Duchamp, in a Heraclitan metaphorical gesture, not only got out of the bath, but then jumped into ever-newer waters and later changed the course of the river. Duchamp was an anti-Cartesian and being so he led the way to a new paradigm in art:

'Oh, no' he answered without hesitation. 'I've never read Descartes to speak of. I was thinking of the logical meaning, the reasoning Cartesianism implies. Nothing is left to the vapours of imagination. It im-

70 He would also refer to it as the transition from a solid modernity to a liquid one (Bauman, 2000).

plies an acceptance of all doubts, it's an opposition to unclear thinking. I happen to have been born a Cartesian. The French education is based on a sequence of strict logic. You carry it with you. I had to reject Cartesianism in a way. I don't say that you can't be both. Perhaps I am. (Duchamp to Ashton, 1966, p.244)

The whimsical manner in which Duchamp answered the enquiry whether or not he was a Cartesian, leaving ambiguous doubts, demonstrated the playful manner that he questioned the 'logical meaning' of Cartesian thought. This questioning is also the subject of Foucault's book *The Order of Things*. In this thesis, this questioning appeared as one of the main provokers. What is the order of things, which presided over the world and over the microcosm of art for a long period of time and whose remnants are still present? To deal with culture is to deal with a certain archaeology in an attempt to unravel the complex layers of order that are juxtaposed in the formation of the complex fabric of reality.

Order, therefore, is always changeable, representing a temporary arrangement that lends, phenomenologically, an appearance to things. Art is one of the ways to reveal these arrangements, and more than that, it allows new forms of organization of the complex cultural fabric to be encoded. For this reason, one of the references was Foucault, a thinker who suspected order's immutability, extolling the role of art in the reorganization of culture and the world, since our perception of reality, predominantly nominalist, is under the veil of culture. *Las Meninas*, by Velázquez, was an index of the reorganization undertaken during the transition from the medieval world to the modern era, where representation began to give way to presentation, threatening the rigid distinction between things belonging to different taxonomic categories, overturning the distinctions between what 'the same' and 'the others' represented. Categories are always figures of speech, elements that help organize the chessboard of reality and allow us to access, even superficially, the nature of things.

Foucault opens the preface to his *The Order of Things* making a reference to the 1942 tale *El idioma analítico de John Wilkins* by Jorge Luis Borges (2007), where the Argentine writer describes a fictional Chinese encyclopaedia that divided the animals into strange classes, such as those that 'belong to the emperor,' 'the fabulous ones,' 'those present in this classification' and 'the innumerable ones', among other taxonomic categories. This tale clearly explains the arbitrariness of categories, which far from being a logical arrangement of things, impose themselves on the world in the form of grids that reflect the syntactic structure

of languages. Because these classifications are syntactic reflections, mirrors of the way language organizes the world with the resources it has available, the order of things is therefore always conventional. They are the result of agreements between distinct repertoires about what each thing means and where it must fit in the world. When convention becomes unsustainable, a new way of organizing the reality board needs to be agreed upon, creating a new layer in the archaeology of culture.

Thus, we are limited to language, to what it allows us to discover and think. Which arrangements are possible and which are not? The answer lies in language itself, since new arrangements are only possible from the expansion of the syntactic and semantic features of language. To propose a new order is to act on the frontiers of language, forcing and testing its limits.

This is the exact operation performed by Duchamp in his trajectory as a player, artist and curator. And this is the reason why this thesis focuses much more on the aspects of Duchampian artistic language and on the new order that it has brought to the world than on specific theories about curatorship, since it deals with the hypothesis that curatorial activity is concerned precisely with the establishment of new syntactic orders. In this respect Duchamp was a pioneer in expanding the grammar of art toward a curatorial consciousness, showing that our hypothesis proved to be correct.

Bearing this understanding in mind, it was not until I was able to head down the route traced by Duchamp, that I reconsidered my art history speculations. I realised that an alternative route in which the historical conjectures were viewed together in order to open up interpretations regarding the curatorial practice would be much more fruitful for the field. It was beyond doubt a much more fascinating approach than the radical alternative that was to assert a conclusive definition of the state of art and its practical demands when reaching the exhibition space.

On the basis of the research presented here, Duchamp can be recognised not only an artist-player, but above all as a curator whose contributions to this field were until now, not well acknowledged. Reflecting on his experience of developing a series of exhibitions at the Société Anonyme, Surrealist Exhibitions and in the survey of his own oeuvre on permanent display at the Philadelphia Art Museum, it was possible to distinguish the methods that he postulated about curatorial practice.

It was by means of investigating the art coefficient – ‘the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state. [...] In other words, the personal ‘art coefficient is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed’ (Duchamp, 2005, p. 518) – of selected artworks by Duchamp that we formulated a methodological routine of analysis in which a part requires the application of the whole and vice-versa.

It was precisely by unravelling the layers of meaning of Duchamp’s artworks that I uncovered his way of thinking during his curatorial projects. Therefore, I set forth herein the analyses of the re-contextualisation dynamics of the readymades; the apprehension of time of the *Nude Descending a Staircase*; the transparent physicality and metonymic application of the *Large Glass*, and the confidential guidelines posthumously given to the public with *Étant Donnés* that contrived an ultimate panorama of Duchamp’s curatorial thinking. Subsequently, I transposed the legacy imparted by this thesis to transnational contexts.

Duchamp established a method suited to the categories’ mutable condition. This was a curatorial method whose principle is the analysis of each context, asking which the possible arrangements are and what the new language tools necessary to implement them are. These features which characterize Duchamp’s curatorial practice are one of the thesis’ findings that point to a reflection on curatorship from a complex and a global perspective. Duchamp’s curatorial practice can be considered a useful code that lends itself to different transnational situations not only restrained to a Eurocentric point of view.

Using his own artworks and those by other artists as the pieces of a game, Duchamp, the chess player – with his acute sensitivity for identifying the art coefficient of each work – set out the exhibition space as a sophisticated chess game. On his chess board, each move surprises either due to its sharpness or its apparent simplicity, composing a game that contrasted with the rigid, typically modern, solutions of the curator Alfred Barr, for example.

Duchamp had the ability to create situations that could surprise the public and the artistic community itself by reshaping what one expects to experience in a museum and how the curatorial order contemplates or challenges such demands and expectations. The perceptive expansion carried out by Duchamp was aimed at provoking the awakening of the public’s consciousness, not only intellectually, but also in terms of body and as to how space is occupied not only by the artworks, but also by the public. The activity of exhibition-making is not



merely about setting up artworks for display and presenting them to the public – ‘but rather setting a friction between them and with their surroundings.’ (Szyłak, 2013, p.544)

Hence, the importance Duchamp attached to space and context is central to the understanding of post-Duchampian art and Duchamp’s curatorial legacy, which must be comprehended as conceptual aesthetic play. This aesthetic play is completely anti-Cartesian, reuniting matter and spirit, body and mind. The use of diagrams as an important part of his method reveals that Duchamp understood, even if intuitively, the role of mathematics as a science of creation, allowing him to take a step back from the concrete world by going into abstraction, to at a distance be able to have a more panoramic view of the world, an operation that mathematical thinking allows.

To understand the changes introduced by Duchamp requires perceiving art as an aesthetic play where seriousness is also transferred from the appearance to the concept, requiring a new step backwards to contemplate more fully the complex relationships among the things of the world. The seriousness is not in the appearance, but in the strength of the game’s set of rules and in the public’s ability to engage with these rules.

Oiticica was an artist capable of undertaking art as an aesthetic play, under the terms conceptually discussed by Gadamer (2006) and put into practice by Duchamp. In the text *The Senses Pointing to a New Transformation* that Oiticica wrote for *Studio International*, the same art magazine to which Duchamp gave the above-mentioned interview, he explained that: ‘We are at the beginning of a new language, a new world of experience in communication and proposing a complete revolution towards an individual-social uprising.’ (Oiticica, 1969, p.4). The artist began his almost philosophical statement stating that:

The process of shifting the main aesthetic from the so called ‘visual’ arts and the introduction, then, of the other senses, should not be concentrated or looked at from a purely aestheticist point of view; it is much more profound; it is a process which, in its ultimate sense, relates and proposes a new unconditioned behaviour possibility: the consciousness of behaviour as a fundamental key to the evolution of the so-called art processes → the consciousness of a totality, of the relation individual-world as a whole action, there the idea of value is not only related to a specific ‘focus’. (Oiticica, 1969, p.1)

The price Oiticica paid for transferring the seriousness of the appearance to the concept was high. For example, this text that was commissioned by *Studio International's* editor at the time, Peter Townsend, and enthusiastically submitted after being proofread by Guy Brett never featured on the magazine's pages. The editor made Oiticica wait and wait but its publication never happened (Figueiredo, 1998). A condensed version of this text appeared in 1970 as his contribution to the Information exhibition catalogue published by MoMA. Meireles, who was also participating in this group exhibition, as his contribution to the catalogue wrote a poetic and utterly political text to speak about a region that does not appear on maps, called Southern Cross, and its inhabitants. He also in a 'metaphorical' manner talked about his own oeuvre:

Within its womb it still bears the shy end of the metaphor: since metaphors have no intrinsic value West of Tordesilhas. It is not that I myself am not fond of metaphors: I want someday all works to be looked at as hallmarks, as remembrances and evocations or real and visible conquests. And whenever listening to the History of this West, people will be listening to fantastic legends and fables and allegories. (Meireles in McShine, 1970, p.85)

The revolutionary aspects of their ideas show to what extent these Brazilian artists are genuine agents of post-Duchampian reality: Oiticica with his seriousness towards the participator that would playfully complete the artistic experience, in the same way, Meireles who dissected the dynamics of the ready-made and subverted it, literally inserting a new order of things into ideological circuits. The critical reviews of their solo exhibitions in transnational contexts were recurring exercises to map in a contemporary situation (without knowing if we would find them or not) the procedures that we have seen engendered by Duchamp. In the 1970s, both Oiticica and Meireles blamed the art world in general for misinterpreting Duchampian gestures or for merely not being open to learning his lessons. Therefore, the analysis of their shows at Tate in the 2000s creates an opening to verify if these allegations are still valid. Now, one can also examine to what extent Duchamp's curatorial practice is understood as a tool box to be used in contemporary curatorial projects.

This thesis sheds light on a still new facet of Duchamp. Although (Wiehager & Neuburguer, 2018) and Filipovic (2016) also dealt with the role of Duchamp as a curator, this research went beyond, contextualizing Duchamp's curatorial practices, proving in chapter 1 that Duchamp was in synchronicity

with the 20<sup>th</sup> century *Zeitgeist*. Duchamp's curatorial activities not only paved the way to modern praxis, but also changed the order of the world of art. These findings represent a prolific field that can guide new practice-led researches into curatorial studies area. Practice-led research arises out of two related ideas. Firstly, 'that creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs' (Smith & Dean 2009, p.5). Secondly, creative practice, such as curatorship, can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research (Smith & Dean 2009). According to Esche 'Curatorial education can find a good balance between theory and practice without denigrating either.' (Esche to Eccles, 2016, no pagination).

Although my research here was not a practice-led research, the main ideas of this thesis informed the curatorial decisions of two major exhibitions I curated in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, following a practice-based research methodology. The first one, *Primary Codes* (figures 126 and 127), took place in 2015 and displayed artworks from four pioneers of the field of computer art: Frieder Nake, Ernest Edmonds, Paul Brown, and Harold Cohen.

The exhibition was the result of more than three years of investigation into the still mostly unknown history of computer art. This research proved to be relevant as though the use of computers as instruments of mediation is supposedly a contemporary phenomenon in the field of arts, on taking a closer look, it reveals deeper and older roots. Thus, it led me to map the artists who were the precursors of this practice. I visited and secured the support of important collections, such as the Victoria & Albert Museum in London and the Kunsthalle Bremen in Germany. I examined the artists' personal archives, compiling an inventory of the most prominent artworks from the beginning of computer art to set up the exhibition.

The curatorial project's directive was to align the aesthetic relations that artists from different contexts and backgrounds presented based on the same proposal: using computer programming as an artistic expression. With this goal in mind, it was therefore fundamental to count on the participation of Harold Cohen, Ernest Edmonds, Paul Brown and Frieder Nake. With their own different approaches, each played a vital role in the development of computer art. The complexity of their varied production was an instigating element for the conception of *Primary Codes*.

The almost one hundred artworks, including computer-generated drawings, videos, real-time art, interactive installations, photographs and paintings, led to Primary Codes becoming the first international show to occupy the entirety of the four floors of the Oi Futuro building in Flamengo, and also its exterior. In the first-floor gallery, a historical overview was presented, focusing on these artists' biographies. For the exhibition, video interviews were carried out with each artist and edited in such a way that the artists appear to be holding a conversation with the public, describing the paths their art had led them along. It was enlightening to the visitor to see the old faces behind the highly-technological artworks speaking with them through the video, as they were talking in a *facetime* video chat. This strategy brought a wonderful feedback from the audience. It proved that creating a connection, even though it was a virtual one, with these artists who worked with a non-familiar artistic language helped the people become open-minded to the aesthetical experience of their oeuvres. It also emerged as a good surprise that part of the audience – elderly people – who are not normally the institution's main public, became fascinated on recognising themselves, their generation, in the image of the artists and in a way became more receptive to their works in the exhibition.

This section also featured photographs of their research labs, of old machines and studios from decades ago, as well as documentation of works that did not withstand the passing of time because of the characteristics of the hardware and software with which they were produced. It was important to bring the historical context to the audience. Following Duchamp's precepts, it was a case of recontextualization.

On the second floor, artworks from several periods were exhibited, highlighting each artist's unique experimentations. Remastered new versions of installations from the 70s and 90s occupied the gallery on the third floor. On the top floor of the cultural centre, a loop projection of one of the first three-dimensional simulations made by a computer was on display.

The exhibition had international coverage and a 208-page book was published (Menezes and Poltronieri, 2018). For the Brazilian public, Primary Codes was a unique opportunity to comprehend the development of computer art. To assemble an anthology of this production based on the work of pioneering names is a pathway to reflect on this practice in contemporary art.



Figure 126  
Primary Codes exhibition, 2015



Figure 127  
Primary Codes exhibition, 2015

The second large exhibition I curated, the festival Mais Performance (figures 128 and 129), in 2016, was dedicated to performance and featured a retrospective of the oeuvre of the Austrian artist Peter Weibel<sup>71</sup>. Performance as a form of contemporary artistic manifestation thrived due to the quest to understand reality through an aesthetic articulation with time. Thus, the artist offers the world a creation that combines matter, body, communication, space, movement and especially currentness. Performance brings to the visual arts the beat of the moment as a latent quality, involving the expectations and responses of all those who share the performative action, including therefore artist and public.

Another factor which makes performance so unique to contemporary culture is its scope, its overflow and its immense potential to incorporate varied forms of making art. This characteristic was not watered down in the many facets that it developed along its trajectory. Without the historical detachment that is necessary for an enlightened analysis, what we can acknowledge in 2016, the year of conception, elaboration and realisation of the Mais Performance Festival in the Oi Futuro Ipanema cultural centre, in Rio de Janeiro, is that no other contemporary artistic practice currently converges as many interests and as many different researches. Therefore, it was paramount to create a space in which performance was both the springboard and the landing ground for exchanges and experimentations. The festival aimed to fulfil this role and achieved this goal.

As the title in English already announces More Performance, the project I conceived and the curatorship I envisaged for Mais Performance, closely following the artists' production, sought to emphasize the new confluences and the different aspects of that which is already recognized as performance. Dur-

71 Peter Weibel was born in Odessa, Ukraine in 1944, and migrated with his family to Austria as a child. He has always been genuinely fascinated with art and communication issues involving the creative process. He studied literature, semiotics, medicine and mathematics with an emphasis on logic. He participated in the conception of the happenings of the Wiener Aktionismus (Viennese Actionism), a group of artists who took performance to the limit of the body's abilities with transgressive and radical actions. He led the insertion of electronic media into the visual arts and experimented with several formats, including TV, video and cinema. He was one of the first to work with concepts such as expanded cinema and to propagate computer art. He also had a career as a musician with the band Hotel Morphila Orchester, founded in 1978. Later, he conceived the electronic opera *Der künstliche Wille*, which had a memorable performance at the Ars Electronica festival in 1984, in Linz, Austria. In 1986, he became Ars Electronica's artistic consultant and later director, between 1992 and 1995, helping to consolidate the event as one of the major forums on contemporary society through the relationship between art and technology. More recently, he has worked with concepts of augmented reality, digital applications and video mapping. In 2002, he was awarded the honour of the Order of Merit of the Austrian Republic, Austria's highest national honour. He resides in Germany, where he is the director of the ZKM, Art and Media Centre in Karlsruhe. Besides being an artist, he is also a curator, having been responsible for the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale from 1993 to 1999. He curated the 4th Moscow Biennial in 2011, in Russia. He taught at several academic institutions in Austria, Germany, the United States and Canada. As a theoretician, he has published dozens of books.



Figure 128  
Mais Performance, *Synthesis zweier sequentieller Maschinen*, 2016



Figure 129  
Mais Performance, *Peter Weibel - The Messenger* exhibition, 2016



ing three intense days, the programme presented the Brazilians Arthur Scovino, Debora Santiago, Gabriela Noujaim, Leandro Goddinho, Marcella França, Túlio Pinto and Wellington de Oliveira Jr, plus the Frenchwoman Anne Roquigny and the English Flora Parrott. Besides meeting the public in live performances, an exhibition with the same name as the festival revealed their artistic thoughts transmuted into videos, projections and interventions and lasted one month.

Although they each have their own unique trajectories and practices, what the Mais Performance artists have in common is the fact of pointing to performance as a poetic expression to deal with current social and political issues. Their questionings permeate everything from the heritage of folk art and religious rituals to the construction of identity, up to the understanding of communication in the digital age. In order to do so, they created narratives commissioned especially for the festival, sometimes fictional, other times subjective, or rooted in real events, aimed at expanding public awareness.

Adding historical weight to the curatorial project, I put together a special show dedicated to the works of the Austrian Peter Weibel, a ground-breaking artist in performance and new media art, titled Peter Weibel: The Messenger. We relied on the participation of Lucas Valentim and the pair Anaïs Karenin and Maurin K, young performers who live in Rio de Janeiro, to reactivate, transporting to the present context and to the place where they live, performances created by Weibel in the 1960s in Vienna, Austria.

With a career spanning over five decades, Peter Weibel is considered a pioneer of the diffusion of performance in the visual arts. Peter Weibel: The Messenger held a retrospective of his performative actions from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. It was the first time that the Brazilian public received a historical anthology of his production with works from his personal collection and from the ZKM, Centre for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany.

On the first night of the festival, two historical actions by Peter Weibel were revived by Brazilian artists. *Synthesis zweier sequentieller Maschinen* (Synthesis of two sequential machines) was first performed in 1967. In this performance, the artist made the human-machine interaction undergo a resistance test in order to see who or what was stronger. The performer says, 'turn on' to an electronic device, in this case a recorder, which replies 'turn off' and deactivates. He then turns the machine back on, which then responds and turns itself off. This game lasts until either the human gets tired or the battery of the electronic device dies.

Talking with Peter Weibel, we concluded that a smartphone would be a suitable device to update *Synthesis zweier sequentieller Maschinen* to nowadays. The performer and actor Lucas Valentim agreed to the challenge of undergoing the resistance test. He stayed put for two and a half hours in this competition, without getting distracted. Upon seeing that the device still had 70% charge, he finished the performance and went to mingle with the guests of the opening cocktail. The 1972 video version of this performance was also shown at the exhibition. In this first version, it was the artist who won and not the machine.

The vernissage also included the performance by the artists Anaïs Karenin and Maurin K, who reactivated the performance *Mehr Wärme unter die Menschen* (More warmth among the people), performed for the first time by Peter Weibel and the Austrian actress and model Susanne Widl, in 1972. The artist discovers fire in the heat of a woman by striking matches on pieces of sandpaper positioned on various parts of her body; subsequently lighting the cigarette she is holding. The video of the original performance, made in Vienna, was on display. To bring it to the present day, the Brazilian collaborators suggested that the female figure light the matches on the man's body, an idea that had already occurred to me, and that I had previously mentioned to Peter Weibel, who agreed to this change. Anaïs Karenin, also a stylist, designed the clothes the pair used, making them almost gender neutral. The result was an insightful recontextualization that resurfaced considerations that have crossed decades, leading to reflections on the behavioural changes between the Viennese of the 1970s and the Cariocas of today.

The structure of these performances was in tune with the artworks that integrated Peter Weibel: *The Messenger* and made all this legacy stand out, transporting a fundamental part of the history of performance to the festival. The selection included videos and photos of dozens of performances, artworks of visual poetry, video poems, video clips and actions created for television broadcasting. Message and messenger formed a single channel of communication with the purpose of deciphering the development of performance, its intrinsic relation with reality and its premonitory role in relation to new horizons and actions.

In terms of curatorial practice, these two exhibitions represented a huge challenge and an opportunity to apply Duchamp's curatorial strategies that are demonstrated in this thesis, creating a context where the exhibitions could take place, and proving that curatorship also has to do with translation, as pointed out

by Asbury (2017). The scholar affirms that: 'the translation celebrates that which it brings forth, that which is considered worthy of being reiterated elsewhere, yet, at one and the same time' (Asbury, 2017, p.191). Thus, applying Duchamp's curatorial strategies in order to translate distinct art forms produced in different contexts and being displayed in their non-native places or countries, collaborates to build a non-Eurocentric corpus of curatorial practices, as it is always necessary to translate from one context to another, celebrating what each place has that is unique. Otherwise, the critical role of the curator would be diminished.

Recollecting the debate about the definition of curating and exhibition-making that preceded this writing in its introduction, the lesson that Duchamp taught Hopps is that the curator should be an invisible agent (Obrist, 2011), or according to Duchamp's curatorial analyses developed in chapter 2, curating should be transparent. Therefore, one could expect that the curator would be also a transparent figure who lets the artworks be seen through the curating. As Duchamp is a predecessor of Hopps, Duchamp can be considered the pioneer behind all pioneers, or this invisible agent about whom Hopps talked about. One can also bring into the discussion the analogy that Hopps made in which the curator should be seen like a conductor of an orchestra. In this case, it must not be forgotten that during the performance the conductor has his back to the audience. The public only get to know the conductor's face when or if the conductor wishes to be identified. For Esche for example 'Curating as an act needs to become less visible as the curatorial as a system of collective knowledge production takes the stage' (Martinon, 2013, p.539).

Having invisibility as a characteristic of curatorship, Duchamp also made, by chance or on purpose, his legacy in curatorial practice out of the sight of art historians and those scholars who are associated with scholarship on contemporary curatorial practice. Nevertheless, the knowledge that he produced while curating can be easily retrieved. In the long run, Duchamp's duty as a curator was to 'care' about art, facilitate the artistic practice of other artists, create a critical mediation and display artworks to their maximum capabilities, connecting and presenting them to the public in such a manner that one could make the most of the experience.

My objective in this thesis was to cover the most important aspects and to provide the necessary information so that one could bring Duchamp's curatorial legacy to the realm of contemporary curating studies. Remembering that to embrace Duchamp's legacy and to try to approach art exhibition from a

global perspective, one should contextualize post-Duchampian artworks. It is not only a matter of object displacement from one place to another, but also of examining and carrying with it the conditions in which the artwork was created as the context is also its content. Nonetheless, it would be an anti-Duchampian move to compare the exhibitions or try to evaluate them according to any rigid criterion. It could lessen the weight of the contribution this research strives to offer, if the retrospectives at Tate Modern were assessed by values of right or wrong. As Duchamp in a correspondence once taught his receivers, I, over the course of this thesis, have learnt:

You are, as we all are, obsessed by the accumulation of principles or anti-principles which generally cloud your mind with their terminology, and, without knowing it, you are a prisoner of what you think is a liberated education. (Duchamp in Naumann & Obalk, 2000, p.321)

Thus, putting aside any terminology that might bring a conclusive end to this research, in these closing remarks I wish to consider one last likelihood, that the realm of curatorship would benefit greatly from a closer inspection of what Duchamp, as a curator, has granted to us. For this reason, I have come to the conclusion that today there is more reason than ever to insist on Duchamp's importance to Art History, in particular to bring a greater understanding of his role to curatorial endeavours. The investigation of the exhibitions that he put together undeniably sheds light on the manner in which we can develop innovative curatorial procedures, in order to keep alive the art coefficient of each artwork and enable the aesthetic experience when it encounters the public. Finally, I believe that further investigation into this area might make for an exciting research development, using this thesis as a theoretical and historical resource.

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